

Edited by  
Gerhard Jaritz

# Angels, Devils

*The Supernatural and  
Its Visual Representation*



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## ANGELS, DEVILS

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# Angels, Devils

## The Supernatural and Its Visual Representation



Edited by  
Gerhard Jaritz

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&  
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## PREFACE

A simple current understanding of the supernatural cannot be the basis for discussing the variety of surviving medieval visual images of supernatural entities or phenomena, which lie beyond the realm of today's scientific understanding or are in direct conflict with scientific concepts of possibility, plausibility or reality in general. Today, one might support the opinion that the supernatural refers to forces and phenomena which cannot be observed in nature and are, therefore, beyond verifiable measurement. If a phenomenon can be observed or demonstrated we might think that it should no longer be considered supernatural. We also might see *supernatural* as being in contrast to *natural*.

Dealing with the medieval situation, however, one has to forget these possibilities of description or definition. There, we are confronted with a generally tight context and connection of the natural and the supernatural.<sup>1</sup> They did not need to be opposed to each other or in contradiction. They often complemented and added to each other. The supernatural was part of life: "Supernatural anomalies, disturbing the patterns taught by experience, were clearly expected. Miracles were thought to occur, demons were believed to appear, signs erupted in the heavens. And yet these things were held to be exceptional ..."<sup>2</sup> The extent to which this can be found in visual representations of the period is one of the main questions of the analyses in this volume.

In 2007, a group of Central and Eastern European specialists in medieval supernatural phenomena and the visual culture of the Middle Ages met at Central European University to discuss the research problem of "The Visual Representation of the Supernatural in the Middle Ages." This meeting became the basis of the present volume. Selected papers of the workshop were revised for print and offer an overview of the different ways in which supernatural forces became part of visual images and should, thereby, have influenced the beholders' understanding of the influence of the supernatural on their life.

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning the borders of the natural and the supernatural in medieval discourse see Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), particularly the chapter "The Boundaries of the Supernatural" (1-33).

<sup>2</sup> Carl S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66.

Helmut Schnitzler deals with the general research question of the relation between theology and art, the latter becoming “painted theology.” The contribution of Gerhard Jaritz concentrates on the question of how various supernatural entities became part of the natural world through their visual representations, and thereby bearers of important messages for their beholders. Béla Zsolt Szakács, Alexander E. Makhov, and Helmut Hundsbichler analyze the visual representations of devils, while Maria Crăciun and Zsófia Buda deal with the images of angels in Christian and Jewish art. György E. Szőnyi discusses the visual representation of Enoch in medieval and Renaissance art. Ana Maria Gruia shows how images of the supernatural found their way into domestic space as apotropaic pictures on stove tiles.

Generally, all the contributions offer good insights into the phenomenon of how images of supernatural entities could become part of the medieval natural world and thereby familiar to their recipients. They offer important new contributions to the “Natural History of the Supernatural.”<sup>3</sup>

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Gerhard Jaritz

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<sup>3</sup> For the use of this expression see Lyall Watson, *Supernature. The Natural History of the Supernatural* (London et al.: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), xiii: “This natural history of the supernatural is designed to extend the traditional five senses into areas where others have been operating undercover. It is an attempt to fit all of nature, the known and the unknown, into the body of Supernature and to show that, of all the faculties we possess, none is more important at this time than a wide-eyed sense of wonder.”

THE BEAM OF GRACE AND THE OCULAR PARADIGM.  
SOME REMARKS ON THE RELATION  
BETWEEN LATE MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY AND ART\*

Norbert Schnitzler

About 1440 the Florentine Painter Filippo Lippi finished his work on the Annunciation altarpiece for the church of San Lorenzo (fig. 1). At first glance one is captivated by the strict spatial composition, a structure of different spatial elements oriented towards a vantage point which is hidden – a common visual trick – by a column. One is almost literally “sucked” into the visual narrative. A further element of this spatial composition occupies the foreground – a landing or a sort of step which passes over into the frame – and evokes a counter-movement in the onlooker, a counter-movement against the visual attraction of the central perspective. The art historian Georges Didier-Huberman has dealt at great length with this painting. He speaks of a dialectical structure in the composition according to which one is permanently attracted as well as repulsed by particular details of the picture. Elsewhere he speaks of “border-crossing,” which passes the threshold but does not violate it.<sup>1</sup>

When gazing at Filippo’s painting we are also confronted with two oversized – rather unfamiliar representations – of *putti* on the left and, furthermore, with a dove floating from the sky in an unspectacular manner. It was Michael Baxandall, who, in his book *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, first published in 1972, paid particular attention to the striking bodily movements and gestures of Mary, which had particular correspondences with her inner state.<sup>2</sup>

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\* I would like to thank Judith Rasson for her advice while reading a first draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Georges Didier-Huberman, *Fra Angelico. Unähnlichkeit und Figuration* (Munich: Fink, 1995), 145; Megan Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999); Daniel Arasse, *L’Annonciation Italienne. Une histoire de perspective* (Paris: Hazan, 1999), 142-4.

<sup>2</sup> I used the German edition: Michael Baxandall, *Die Wirklichkeit der Bilder. Malerei und Erfahrung im Italien des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt/Main: Syndikat, 1977), 66-7 and 115-25; Pierre Bourdieu and Yves Delsaut, “Pour une sociologie de la perception,” *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 7 (1981): 3-9; Allan Langdale, “Aspects of the Critical Reception and Intellectual History of Baxandall’s Concept of the Period Eye,” *Art History* 21.4 (1998): 479-97.



Fig. 1: Filippo Lippi, Annunciation, c. 1440, tempera, San Lorenzo (Florence).

From: Georges Didier-Hubermann, *Fra Angelico. Unähnlichkeit und Figuration* (Munich: Fink, 1995), 142, pl. 58

All these observations are enlightening and noteworthy – but my consideration will concentrate on another subject: It focuses on a glass-carafe which the painter had placed exactly at the threshold between onlooker and the visual scene (fig. 2). Its shape is also of interest and – even more – its meticulously marked reflections and refractions.<sup>3</sup> The visual imagination of the onlooker is particularly challenged by the strange edge in the belly of the carafe – is this a reflection or perhaps an extended edge of its base? Didier-Huberman suggests – somewhat accidentally, and yet not misleadingly – that the belly represents the ‘womb’ of the Virgin by arguing that the carafe or ‘vase’ in Annunciation scenes always figures as a motif of the Virgin and her pregnancy.<sup>4</sup> Like Didier-Huberman, I am interested in discussing the scope of contemporary visual fantasy; indeed, one could spin his line of associations even further. The following remarks, however, are preoccupied with a rather different topic.

<sup>3</sup> Johannes H. Emminghaus, “Verkündigung an Maria,” in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* IV (Rome et al.: Herder, 2004), 432; Leo Steinberg, “How shall this Be? Reflections on Filippo Lippi’s Annunciation in London,” *Artibus et Historiae* 16 (1987): 25–44.

<sup>4</sup> Didier-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 145 and note 25.

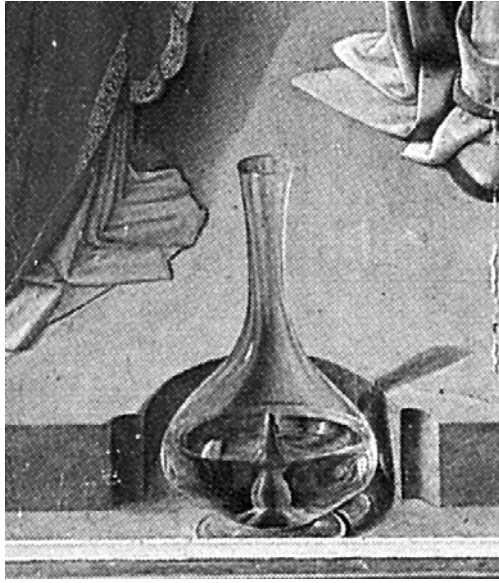


Fig. 2: Filippo Lippi, Annunciation, detail: carafe

Besides these aesthetic principles there are different theological ideas and aspects of current interest, for instance the crucial mystery of incarnation.<sup>5</sup> Following this path I would suggest locating the painting of Filippo Lippi – and several other pictorial and textual sources as well – within the context of late medieval theological debates; for instance, within the discursive context of the medieval debate about the Christian icon and its setting within religious ritual. After the last decades of the fourteenth century this debate intensified more and more. Sometimes it was influenced – which is usually ignored – by both the change of style in contemporary art production and the change in techniques of representation. Furthermore, these changes, implying new types of visual experiences, affected theological arguments, for instance on the problem of how to deal with “superstition.” Theologians of the time sought a reason for the misuse of religious images (*abusus imaginum*) and they found it by looking a bit closer at contemporary image production.<sup>6</sup>

I will proceed in a threefold way. First I shall give some introductory remarks on writings by the authorities in medieval optics, concentrating on their focus on the anatomy of the human eye and eyesight. I will then discuss a tract written around 1300 by Peter of Limoges, who provided an important text which contains a detailed allegorical consideration

<sup>5</sup> Emminghaus, “Verkündigung an Maria.”

<sup>6</sup> Norbert Schnitzler, “Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Bilder – Bild und Frömmigkeit zur Zeit der Reformkonzilien,” in *Das Bild als Autorität. Die normierende Kraft des Bildes*, ed. Frank Büttner and Gabriele Wimböck (Münster: Lit, 2004), 447-78.

of the optical aspects of eyesight. It was the first step in disseminating optical models in “external,” non-scientific, moralizing fields of discourse and – eventually – in the intensifying theological debates on images and image worship. Finally, I will try to show, by reference to some examples of image material, that the optical paradigm – as I would like to label it – improved its persuasive authority in the sense that it was able to combine religious truth with visual evidence in a new way. Painters of both Northern and Southern cultural capitals made use of this new paradigm.

#### FROM EXTROMISSION TO INTROMISSION:

#### THE RECOVERY OF OPTICS IN THE FIELD OF SCIENCE IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

The renewed interest in optics in the Middle Ages is usually associated with three prominent scholars of the second half of the thirteenth century: Witelo, Roger Bacon, and Johannes Peckham (two of them members of the Minorite order). Basically, they each tried to compile a synthesis of recent knowledge about the different aspects of optical theory, inspired by the writings of the Arabic astronomer and mathematician Alhazen (Ibn al-Haïtam, d. 1040, Cairo) and by Aristotelian philosophy, mediated, for instance, by Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253). These efforts were not based on genuine interest in “natural science,” however, but rather on the hope of gaining new insights into the nature and preconditions of human cognition. In other words, the interest in human eyesight was inspired entirely by the desire for recognition of the divine. In the long run, scholars like Witelo and Peckham paved the way for the dissemination of the principles of visual perception into the curricula of academic teaching. They also raised awareness that the cognitive activities involved in the process of seeing were quite different from the familiar activities of recognition which were based on notions, that is to say, on linguistic operations of the mind. The term *species* was crucial.<sup>7</sup>

Roger Bacon describes *species* as visible forms or shapes, respectively, which pass from the object into the eye; this transfer can be represented as a geometrical sketch, a so-called *pyramidis radialis seu visualis*, that is to say, a bundle of rays in the shape of a pyramid with the base located in the object and the edge meeting the eye (fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> Johannes Peckham adds:

These rays are broken for the first time on the background of the *humor glacialis*, that is to say they are deflected from the center of the eye. Therefore they do not

<sup>7</sup> David C. Lindberg, *Auge und Licht im Mittelalter: Die Entwicklung der Optik von Alkindi bis Kepler* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 212-3; Giorgio Stabile, “Teoria della visione come teoria della conoscenza,” in *La visione e lo sguardo nel Medio Evo*, Micrologus V (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 225-48; Katherine H. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham. Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics, 1250-1345* (Leiden et al.: Brill, 1988); Jörg Alejandro Tellkamp, *Sinne, Gegenstände und sensibilia. Zur Wahrnehmungslehre des Thomas von Aquin* (Leiden et al.: Brill, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Lindberg, *Auge und Licht*, 199-201.

converge in an apex but pass the *humor vitreus* through the *nervus opticus* and eventually reach the *nervus communis* where the *species* of both eyes are joining together. Those ‘images’ or ‘likenesses’ which we designate as *species* have no essential or material properties but are exclusively formal entities, that is to say they have only properties of figure and colour.<sup>9</sup>

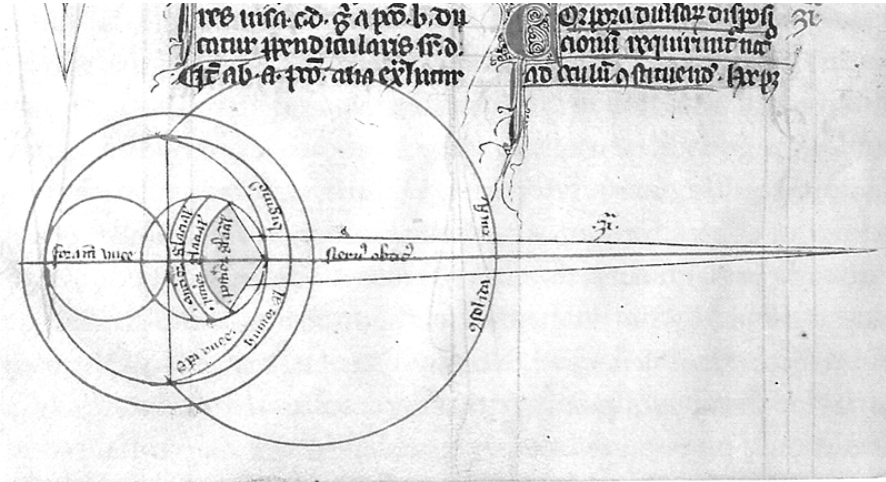


Fig. 3: Diagram after Johannes Peckham, *Perspectiva communis*, c. 1320, Bodleian Library (Oxford), MS Ashmole 1522, fol. 153v. From: Rolf Toman (ed.), *Die Kunst der Gotik. Architektur, Skulptur, Malerei* (Cologne: Könemann, 1998), 439

#### THE RISE OF OPTICS AS A PARADIGM UNDER THE SIGN OF DEVOTIONAL THEOLOGY

There is some evidence that just a few years later the “optical” models and ideas which originally came from “natural history” were adopted by authors of pastoral and moralistic treatises. One could take that as a hint at the increasing significance of optics, figuring now as a paradigm – but, a paradigm for what?

One of these moralistic treatises can serve as an example, for instance, the *Liber de oculo morali* (dating around 1300) written by Peter of Limoges. This *exempla* collection spread rapidly through the libraries of late medieval Europe. Looking at contemporary catalogues,

<sup>9</sup> Johannes Peckham, *Perspectivae communis libri tres, iam postremo correcti ac figuris illustrati* (Cologne, 1592). – I give a paraphrase of Peckham’s description following Gudrun Schleusener-Eichholz, *Das Auge im Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Munich: Fink, 1983), vol. 1, 73.

one can find far more than 100 manuscripts containing copies of it dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

Peter's starting point is the anatomy of the eye, which he took from the widely known writings of Alhazen. First, he gives a detailed explanation of the nature of eyesight using the concept of intromission. But, in the interior (of the eye) acts in another capacity (Lat. *virtus*), according to Peter a sort of active sight (*spiritus visualis*) which mediates between the cognitive parts of the mind and the *nervus opticus* (optical nerves). In the following part he develops an allegorical understanding of eyesight which depends on biblical texts. The Franciscan monk establishes his basic argument by stating that the cognitive parts of the human mind have a special sense which can censure images that are received by the optical nerves. This is to say, human beings are capable of separating indecent stimuli from morally approved ones through cognition.

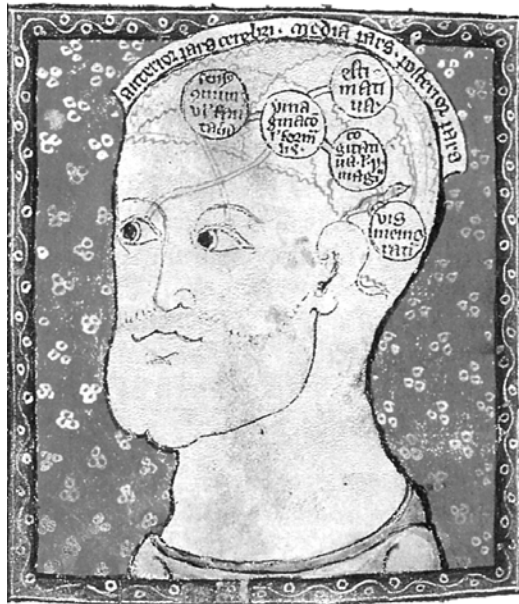


Fig. 4: Schematic representation of the human brain with five ventricles after Avicenna (Abu 'Ali al-Husain), c. 1310, Cambridge University Library, MS G.g.I.i., fol. 490v. From: Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Visions and Revelations of the Medieval World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996), 23, fig. 12

<sup>10</sup> Hieronymus Spettmann, "Das Schriftchen 'De oculo morali' und sein Verfasser," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 16 (1923): 309-22; David L. Clark, "Optics for Preachers: the 'oculi morali' of Peter of Limoges," *The Michigan Academician* 9,3 (1977): 329-43; Gudrun Schleusener-Eichholz, "Naturwissenschaft und Allegorese: Der 'Tractatus de oculi' des Petrus von Limoges," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 12 (1978): 258-309, fig. 54-60; Baxandall, *Wirklichkeit*, 130-1.



In another passage Peter follows Alhazen's argument for intromission. Alhazen stated that the phenomenon of the "after-image" (*Nachbild*) remaining in the eye, even though the object has disappeared, proves this theory. Peter turns this argument into a moralistic one. He concludes that an intensive gaze on a suitable object would evoke a long-lasting impression on the mind of a person. Thus, the *fideles* would be urged to behave correctly according to the commandments of Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

It is intriguing to read those passages which are specifically concerned with optical illusions. For instance, Peter refers to the example of a stick which – if partly dipped into the water – appears to be bent at the place where the surface of the water "cuts" the stick, or, in a further example, a star seems to grow while moving downwards to the horizon. Finally, a finger, when held up close in front of the eyes, seems to hop to and fro as each eye is opened and closed.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, Peter is interested likewise in physical processes and in allegorical epistemology when discussing the phenomena of optical illusions and their effects. Moreover, he argues that there is an almost physiological basis for the human disposition to behave well, because man has an interior "mirror" (*speculum*) which is capable of accumulating divine light. This interior mirror is to be identified as the interior sense (fig. 4), which participates in visual perception (the *sensus communis* / *vis fantasia* / *ymaginatio informalis*) while connecting it to cognition (distinctive ratio, *estimation*). In this way, vision and cognition assemble images received by both eyes into a homogenous "binocular" picture.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE OPTICAL PARADIGM IN LATE MEDIEVAL THEOLOGICAL DEBATES ABOUT IMAGES

The debate on the role of images in medieval Christianity became an important intersection where abstract models borrowed from natural science were used to clarify problems of Christian faith, especially problems of image devotion. First English and later Bohemian and German theologians discussed this religious topic.<sup>14</sup>

Besides an important contribution to this question by Nikolaus of Dresden (d. 1417), a reform-oriented theologian some hundred years after Peter of Limoges (which cannot be extensively discussed here<sup>15</sup>), another, more apologetic, treatise by an English

<sup>11</sup> Petrus of Limoges, *De oculo morali* (Augsburg, 1477), cap. VII, *Avii*; see also Clark, "Optics," 337-8.

<sup>12</sup> Petrus of Limoges, *De oculo morali*, cap. VII, *Axi- Axi*; see Ulrich Pfisterer, "Visio und veritas – Augentäuschung als Erkenntnisweg in der nordalpinen Malerei am Übergang von Spätmittelalter zu Früher Neuzeit," in *Bild als Autorität*, 157-204, esp. 164-6.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, "Optics," 341.

<sup>14</sup> Schnitzler, "Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Bilder," 469-71.

<sup>15</sup> Nikolaus of Dresden, *De imaginibus*, ed. Jana Nechutová, *Sborník prací filosofické fakulty brněnské univerzity* E15 (1970): 211-40; František Šmahel, "Nikolaus v. Dresden," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* VI (Munich: Artemis, 1993), col. 1179; Norbert Schnitzler, *Ikonoklasmus – Bildersturm. Theologischer Bilderstreit und ikonoklastisches Handeln während des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Fink, 1996), 55-7.

Carmelite named Thomas Netter (Waldensis, d. 1431), written in the 1420s, will be discussed here. He introduced some new elements, for instance, optical motifs that he hoped would clarify the reasons why Christians are inclined to superstition. His treatise *De cultu imaginum* deals at length with idolatry against the backdrop of repressing Lollardy and the Hussite influence. When discussing different explanations for confusing image and prototype – the classical definition of idolatry – Thomas did not confine himself to the familiar Aristotelian distinction between the essence (*essentia*) and shape (*figura* and *forma*) of a given object. Instead, he rather introduced a further argument to emphasize his point by using analogy to the principles of the optical sciences.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas favoured Alhazen's *intermission* theory.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, he states that the appearance of the colour of an object does not depend on a material form of communication between the eye and the object seen. The optical nerves are stimulated by the colour of the observed object (*oculus ... non reciperet aliquam coloris speciem per sui medium transferendam ad sensum; sed suo* [i.e. *obiectum*] *colore sensum afficeret*).<sup>18</sup> Equally – this is a personal, independent conclusion of Thomas – it seems impossible to infer a material contact between a sacramental object and its pious beholder. Insofar as the misuse of reliquaries and images is an outcome of deception or – in analogy to optical illusions – the “sweet” sight of a drink in a glass deceives the sense of taste by hiding its true character.<sup>19</sup>

This sounds a bit like talking in terms of cognitive science or psychology. True, but the main interest of late medieval theology was directed towards transcending these primary effects of image devotion in favour of achieving the spiritual or, eventually, as the editors of this volume put it, the supernatural sphere. I would emphasize however just *one* aspect: It is worthwhile observing how medieval theologians tried to specify crucial notions of the image debate like veneration (*veneratio*) or adoration (*adoratio*) with the help of semantics and analogy, referring to “natural” processes of optical/visual transmission or exchange. In that sense they made use of the striking evidence of the ocular paradigm. In the context of the academic activities in medieval Europe one may classify these methods as specific strategies to grasp the rather irritating, even magical, practices of contemporaries facing Christian images.

#### ECHOES FROM FLORENCE

Some twenty years after Thomas Netter wrote his treatise on images and idolatry, two reform-minded clerics from transalpine Italy discussed some further influential thoughts on images. One was Leon Battista Alberti (d. 1472), a participant of the Basle Council of the

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Waldensis (gen. Netter), “De cultu imaginum,” in *Thomas Waldensis Carmelitae Anglici Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae Ecclesiae* (c. 1420), Venice, 1759, col. 929 sq.

<sup>17</sup> Lindberg, *Auge und Licht*, 250-2.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Waldensis, “De cultu imaginum,” 929.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

1430s and author of the famous *Libri della pittura* (1435). The other was a clerical colleague, Antoninus, the archbishop of Florence (d. 1459). I will leave Alberti aside here although it is tempting to read his treatise *Della pittura* against the backdrop of the image debates in Northern Europe.<sup>20</sup> It is also interesting to see that Antoninus, a contemporary of Alberti, dedicated a whole chapter of his *Summa theologia* to the art of painting, especially religious art and its painters, respectively.<sup>21</sup> His comments are harsh criticism, blaming the artists, for instance, for indecent subjects like *mulieres nuda*, which were – in the eyes of Antoninus – only represented in order to “stimulate the desires of the beholder” (*provocans ad libidem*). Instead – according to Antoninus – paintings should demonstrate the inner beauty (*pulcritudo*), that is to say, the exemplary virtue or holiness of a person.<sup>22</sup>

The archbishop of Florence kept an attentive eye on the art scene of his day, but, at the same time, he was an advocate of a scientific worldview. In accordance with Alberti, he shared an ambitious position stating that human life, the sphere as well as creation in general, were structured according to mathematical principles. He labelled it *Geometria spiritalis*.<sup>23</sup> This attitude is well demonstrated, for instance, by his extremely detailed and scrupulous comments on the biblical narrative of the Annunciation.<sup>24</sup>

Keeping these remarks of Antoninus in mind, one can now turn back to the starting point of this inquiry, examining once again Filippo Lippi's altarpiece at San Lorenzo. True, many aspects which are commented on by Antoninus find corresponding features in Filippo's representation of the Annunciation. His *Summa* provides no convincing interpretation, however, for the strange glass carafe. Even though Mary's body is occasionally compared to a vessel which is infused by the divine spirit and in which the divine word became

<sup>20</sup> It seems rather unlikely that Alberti – a papal legate at the Basle council of 1433 – would not have taken notice of the intense debates on the role of images in Christian religious culture and ritual. – Oskar Bätschmann, “Kunstgenuß statt Bilderkult. Wirkungen und Rezeption des Gemäldes nach Leon Battista Alberti,” in *Macht und Ohnmacht der Bilder. Reformatorischer Bildersturm im Kontext der europäischen Geschichte*, ed. Peter Blickle et al. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002), 333–58; Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti. Baumeister der Renaissance* (Berlin: Berlin-Verlag, 2002), 161–3; Gerhard Wolf, “Nikolaus Cusanus ‚liest‘ Leon Battista Alberti: Alter Deus und Narziß,” in *Porträt*, ed. Rudolf Preimesberger et al. (Berlin: Reimer, 1999), 201–9.

<sup>21</sup> *Sancti Antonini Summa Theologia* (Verona, 1740; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1959), pars III, tit. 8, sec. 4, cap. 11: *De statu mercatorum et artificiorum*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem. See Creighton Gilbert, “The Archbishop on the Painters of Florence, 1450,” *Art Bulletin* 61 (1959): 75–87 – Antoninus' displeasure had been also incurred by other ‘monstrosities’, for instance, by representations of the Trinity showing a head with three faces, *quod monstrum est in rerum natura*. See especially Schnitzler, *Ikonoklasmus*, 61, note 119; Cécile Dupeux and Peter. Jezler (ed.), *Bildersturm – Wahnsinn oder Gottes Wille?*, exhibition catalogue (Zurich: NZZ-Verlag, 2000), 282.

<sup>23</sup> *Mensura temporalia facit Geometria spiritalis ... Dimensiones non quantitativas, sed virtuales mensurat in Deo ... per ... longitudinem aeternitatis, latitudinem extensae caritatis, altitudinem immensae potestatis, profundum sapientia claritatis*. Antoninus, *Summa Theologia*, IV, tit. 16, cap. 1, col. 1265.

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Y. Edgerton, “*Mensura temporalia facit Geometria spiritalis*: Some Fifteenth-century Italian Notions about when and where the Annunciation Happened,” in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irving Lavin and John Plummer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), I, 115–30.

flesh there is still no reference to a liquid-filled vase made of glass or crystal. To my knowledge, only Northern Europe provides relevant written sources which contain explicit reference to such allegories. Thus, the Swedish visionary Birgitta (d. 1373) refers to topoi of medieval Marian allegory in manifold ways in her famous *Revelationes celestes* (Divine Revelations). These visionary accounts of Birgitta are another impressive example of the rhetorical strength of optical paradigm, of metaphors of rays and light in writings of late medieval theology. According to Birgitta the glass carafe, which is often described as illuminated by the glaring rays of the sun, symbolizes the unharmed *physis* of the Virgin's body.<sup>25</sup> Like the focussed beam of light passing the glass without breaking it, Birgitta states, the divine beam of grace passes through Mary's womb without violating her, and indeed even without touching her – since the text literally speaks of *virgo intacta*, the untouched.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, the motif of the glass carafe partially filled with liquid was not only adopted but was used in various ways by a large number of painters. From a methodological point of view it would be misleading to underestimate the fundamental difference between written text and image, that is to say, the scope of variation available to the artist. Thus, one has to concede a further epistemological level of interpretation on the artist's side, inspired – but not depending on – scholastic and pastoral authoritative texts. That medieval painters were capable of doing so – Rudolf Berliner labelled it “the freedom of medieval art”<sup>27</sup> – is indicated, for instance, by the fact that the “beam of grace” is occasionally not represented by a drafted line. Painters – especially those from the North – were eager to pretend or to simulate the physics of light and optics as immaterial processes. Their paintings represent processes which were actually invisible and could not be shown, but they reached their goal by directing attention to the effects caused by light and optics, which means on reflections and more or less illuminated surfaces. By imitating the principles and laws of nature in their representations they increased the visual truth of painting and, at the same time, the truth of the biblical narrative – the Christian mystery of Incarnation – which is inseparably interwoven with the visual representation.<sup>28</sup> Demonstrative representations of optical phenomena and effects like these, which become unmistakably clear when discussing exegetical

<sup>25</sup> Birgitta Suecica, *Revelationes* (Nuremberg, 1521), lib. VIII, cap. XLVIII: *De v<erb>o: angelus habet vas et sinum significat: q<uod> sicut puer quiescit in sinu matris: sic angelus laborat vt a<nima> p<raesentetur> deo quasi in vase: et in sinu eterne consolationis reg<nescat>.* In the index this reference is noted as: *Vitro fragilis similes est vita hominis.* Pfisterer, “*Visio und veritas*,” 170 refers to the exegetical tradition of a *topos* mentioned by Cicero: *corpus quasi vas* (Tusc. 1, 52); of course, there is no explicit reference to a vessel made of glass. Ute Davitt-Asmus, *Corpus quasi vas. Beiträge zur Ikonographie der italienischen Renaissance* (Berlin: Mann, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> Anselm Salzer, *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters* (Linz, 1893; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967).

<sup>27</sup> Rudolf Berliner, “The ‘Freedom’ of Medieval Art,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 28 (1945): 263–88.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Suckale, “Zum Körper- und Wirklichkeitsverständnis der frühen niederländischen Malerei,” in *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter. Politisch-soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, körperliche Ausdrucksformen*, ed. Klaus Schreiner (Munich: Fink, 2002), 271–98, esp. 277.

issues of the Marian iconography, I would like to label as *Wahrheitsparadigma* (a paradigm of truth).<sup>29</sup>

#### REPRESENTING THE SUPERNATURAL

In the following examples I will question the view that the preference for optical effects and their aesthetic presentation was exclusively the purview of Italian artists and Italian art production. In contrast, there is quite early evidence in Northern Europe for the adoption of the same motifs, that is, carafes and other glass vessels, as symbols for the Mother of God. Thus, Italy and the North appear to have acquired these motifs at the same time, although independently.



Fig.5: Rogier van der Weyden, Annunciation, 1440, tryptich (central panel), oil on wood, Musée du Louvre (Paris). From: Toman, *Die Kunst der Gotik*, 414

<sup>29</sup> My reading of this term is predominantly inspired by David Gugerli, "Soziotechnische Evidenzen. Der »Pictorial Turn« als Chance für die Geschichtswissenschaft," *Traverse* 1999/3: 131-58.

Looking at Rogier van der Weyden's version of the Annunciation (fig. 5), dating from around 1440, one is struck immediately by a completely different composition of architecture and furnishings.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to Filippo Lippi, the Flemish artist has placed the glass carafe on a mantelpiece on the outer left. It figures quite inconspicuously among the furnishing objects distributed all over the room. One can stop at this level of interpretation confined to the 'documentary' layer of the painting and wonder about the almost photographic precision of it. In reference to the theological issues – the debates on incarnation and the iconographic topics of the Annunciation scene – one can go a step further. A closer inspection will reveal that Rogier van der Weyden, too, had taken the opportunity to demonstrate optical principles by accentuating the reflections and refractions on the surface of the glass carafe (fig. 6). At a distinct point of the vessel's womb the surface glitters when illuminated by a sun-beam falling from the right.

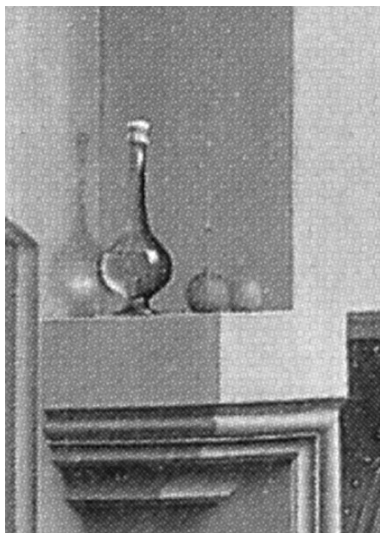


Fig. 6: Detail of Fig. 5

Pointing to this spot in the painting illustrates an important remark in the writings of the friar Roger Bacon (14<sup>th</sup> c.). He states in his treatise on optics that the rays meeting the eye from a perpendicular angle immediately reach the inner centre of the organ – the so-called 'glass vessel' (*corpus vitreus*).<sup>31</sup> All remaining rays are reflected and disseminate in a dif-

<sup>30</sup> Dirk de Vos, *Rogier van der Weyden. Het volledige oeuvre* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1999); Bret Rothstein, "Vision, Cognition and Self-reflection in Rogier van der Weyden's Bladelin Triptych," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 64 (2001): 37-55.

<sup>31</sup> Lindberg, *Auge und Licht*, 199-201.

fused mode. Looking at the glass carafe in Rogier's painting, one notes that the most intense rays pass straight ahead through the glass onto the wall behind, where they form a spotlight within the shadow of the vessel. One may ask if this carafe filled with liquids is considered as an experimental configuration by which medieval artists studied the anatomy of the human eye. Perhaps this provides a clue as to how scholars of natural science established a model for reconstructing eyesight.

If one accepts the actual challenge of the much-cited "visual turn,"<sup>32</sup> it would mean that one is entitled to ask if the newly established models of visual perception caused the establishment of new categories and scales of experience – ways of interpreting sensual activities. Rogier van der Weyden used optical effects as rhetorical elements in a twofold way. On the one hand they figure as apologetic devices of painting pretending to show its subjects in the same way as nature presents them to the eye. On the other hand they figure as "painted" theology comparable to written *exegesis*, as was articulated by Birgitta of Sweden in her *Revelationes celestis*. It is a primary goal of this paper to demonstrate that the rhetorical strength of the ocular paradigm was exploited by painters in the cultural capitals of both Northern and Southern Europe. A detailed analysis of particular motifs reveals that artists were eager to demonstrate the validity of the *intromission* model and of optical science in general.<sup>33</sup> By doing so such paintings suggest that even nature could not have done better.

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<sup>32</sup> William J. T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," in idem, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 11-34; Hans-Dieter Huber and Gottfried Kersch, "Towards the Iconic Turn (A discussion with Horst Bredekamp, 7.11.1997)," *Kritische Berichte* 26.1 (1998): 85-7; Gugerli, "Soziotechnische Evidenzen;" Christa Maar and Hubert Burda (ed.), *Iconic turn – Die neue Macht der Bilder* (Cologne: DuMont, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> See my forthcoming article: "What Do We See When We See with the Mind's Eye? Jan van Eyck and the Ocular Paradigm of Late Medieval Piety," in *A Journey to Vision. Perspectives on Vision in the Ghent Altarpiece*, ed. Inigo Bocken et al.





VISUAL IMAGES OF THE SUPERNATURAL, OR,  
HOW TO MAKE THE ENTITIES RECOGNIZABLE  
THAT ARE NOT PART OF OUR NATURAL WORLD

Gerhard Jaritz

A cradle with a six-week-old baby in it fell from a bench onto another child so that both of them died. Their mother prayed to the Virgin of the Styrian pilgrimage, Mariazell. By the latter's intervention both children became alive again (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> In the visual image of this miracle report, from about 1519, the accident is shown as well as the image of the mediating Virgin, whose representation was clearly recognizable for 'everybody,' as it followed a regular pattern (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> A descriptive caption strengthened the message.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the text and its visual representation show that the supernatural and its power over specific problems of human life had become familiar and part of the natural world.

Visual representations and their messages' mediation to the beholders which they were meant for have to be seen as indispensably connected with a variety of contexts. On the one hand, images of the 'supernatural' had to be recognizable for their audience, that is, to become in some way (more) 'natural'; but, on the other hand, they

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<sup>1</sup> Panel of the so-called "Großer Mariazeller Wunderaltar," Master of the Brucker Martinstafel, c. 1519. Graz (Styria), Landesmuseum Joanneum. For the "Großer Mariazeller Wunderaltar" and its images see, for instance, Peter Krenn, "Der große Mariazeller Wunderaltar von 1519 und sein Meister," *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Institutes der Universität Graz* 2 (1966/67): 31-51; idem, "Der Mariazeller Kunstkreis des Spätmittelalters und König Ludwig I. von Ungarn," in *Ungarn in Mariazell – Mariazell in Ungarn. Geschichte und Erinnerung*, ed. Péter Farbaky and Szabolcs Serfőző (Budapest: Historisches Museum der Stadt Budapest, 2004), 311-8; Walter Brunner (ed.), „... da half Maria aus aller Not“. *Der Große Mariazeller Wunderaltar aus der Zeit um 1520* (Graz: Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv, 2002); Gerhard Jaritz, "Der Große Mariazeller Wunderaltar. Oder: Zeichen der ‚Allmacht‘ der Gottesmutter," in *Mariazell und Ungarn. 650 Jahre religiöse Gemeinsamkeit*, ed. Walter Brunner et al. (Graz and Esztergom: Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv, 2003), 61-8.

<sup>2</sup> Panel of the so-called "Kleiner Mariazeller Wunderaltar," 1512: Rescue from a punishment (detail: the Virgin of Mariazell). Graz (Styria), Landesmuseum Joanneum.

<sup>3</sup> *Ein kind vi wuchen alt mit der wiegen von einer panck auff ein ander kind gefallen, das peidi dot warn; die leidig moeter peide kind gen Zell verbies, do wurden si widerum gesunt.*

should also not lose the ‘supernatural’ character of the message.<sup>4</sup> They were supposed to mean proximity as well as distance for their beholders, explicability and inexplicability at the same time.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 1: The supernatural power of the Virgin helps after two infants had a deadly accident

<sup>4</sup> About the general medieval and early modern views on the relationship between natural, supernatural, and preternatural, mainly based on the teachings of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, see Lorraine Daston, “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991): 95-100.

<sup>5</sup> One still may think here of Peter Brown’s statement about the society of the eleventh and twelfth centuries: “The sacred, therefore, was intimately connected with the life of the group on every level. At the same time, however, it was operative because it was thought of as radically different from the human world into which it penetrated. It was all that the human community was not.” [Peter Brown, “Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change,” in: *Witchcraft in the Ancient World and the Middle Ages*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1992), 97-115; repr. from *Daedalus* 104 (1975): 133-51].



Fig. 2: The Virgin of Mariazell, recognizable to ‘everybody’

Moreover, it has to be emphasized that any kind of ‘supernatural’ entities and phenomena, as well as their visual representations, could not be seen as *contra naturam*, following Saint Augustine in his *De civitate Dei*: “For how can anything done by the will of God be contrary to nature, when the will of so great a Creator constitutes the nature of each created thing?”<sup>6</sup>

This is particularly evident for any kind of miracles and their late medieval and early modern visual representations. Miracle images, like miracle reports, regularly dealt with well-known severe problems of daily life that were solved by the intervention of the supernatural. It was the commonness of the problems of one’s life connected with the exceptionality of supernatural powers that were able to help if one could contact them successfully through prayers or vows.

Miraculous help or support by the supernatural intervention of saints was independent of social space and status. This fact was emphasized particularly by miracle reports and their visual representations. The supernatural power of the Virgin of Mariazell was effective because of the prayers and vow of the mother of the two infants, just like, for instance, those of a young labourer: Because of a stroke he was paralyzed on one side of his body; he was healed through the intervention of the Virgin of Mariazell (fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> The legends, however, tell that the Virgin intervened in the problems of

<sup>6</sup> Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* xxi, 8.2: *Quomodo est enim contra naturam, quod Dei fit voluntate, cum voluntas tanti utique Conditoris conditae rei cuiusque natura sit?* See also Daston, “Marvelous Facts,” 95-7.

<sup>7</sup> Panel of the “Großer Mariazeller Wunderaltar.” *Ein innger knecht kam gen Cell, dem bett der schlach die ain seiten und arm seins leibs verderbt, alsz bald er sein gepett opfert, ward er gesunt, ward seini glider wider brauchen.*

rulers, too: as, in particular, for King Louis I of Hungary (1342-82),<sup>8</sup> and also Margrave Henry I of Moravia (1191-1222) and his wife. The latter suffered from gout and, in a dream, Saint Wenceslas directed them to the Virgin of Mariazell. When they woke up, they were healed (fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> The reports and public images thus showed, and were clearly meant to prove, that there were no differences in the supernatural efficacy of the Virgin and its application to members of the different social levels of society: Anyone who was in need could receive help. This was one of the most important messages that the visual representation of miracles was able to convey to a broad public.

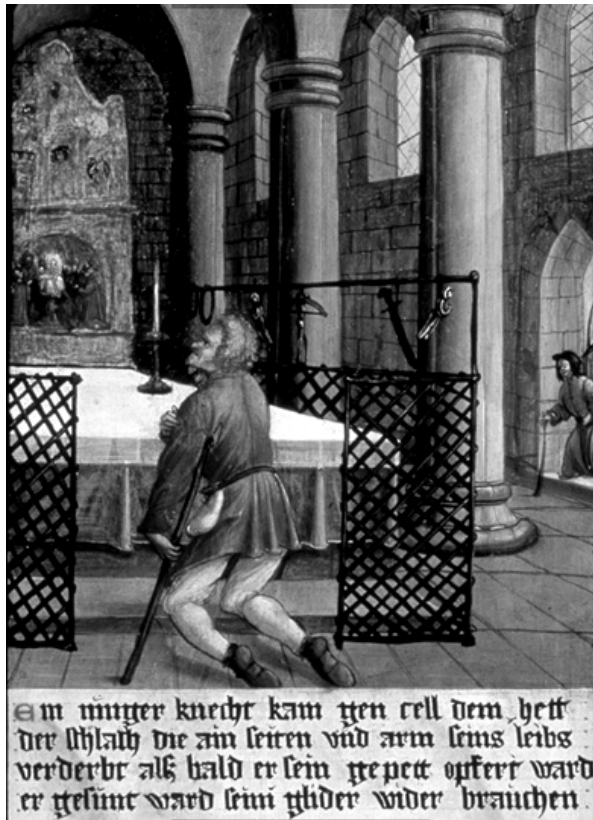


Fig. 3: Supernatural healing of a labourer

<sup>8</sup> See, e. g., Kornél Szovák, "König Ludwig der Grosse und Mariazell," in *Mariazell und Ungarn*, ed. Brunner, 82-92.; Krenn, "Der Mariazeller Kunstkreis."

<sup>9</sup> Panel of the "Großer Mariazeller Wunderaltar": *Marggraff Hainrich in Merbern mit seinem gemahell lagen krumpp n benden und fiessen, do wurden sie von sanct Wentzl gen Zell gewisen, alsz si erwachten, funden sie sich gesunt.*



Fig. 4: Supernatural healing of Margrave Henry of Moravia and his wife

There are many other examples and patterns of the visual representation of the supernatural, their context in the natural world, and the way their message was transmitted to a wide public. One of them is the image of the devil that is discussed in more detail in the contributions of Alexander E. Makhov, Helmut Hundsichler and Béla Zsolt Szakács in this volume.<sup>10</sup>

Again, it was the perception of the supernatural entity that counted. Devils should be recognizable for everybody, in reality as well as in their visual representation.<sup>11</sup> Their image could be made familiar to their beholders and recognizable for

<sup>10</sup> See pages 28–48, 49–71 and 72–88.

<sup>11</sup> In this context, the different levels of ‘proximity’ dealt with by Helmut Hundsichler are important. For the devil in images see also, e. g., Oswald Erich, *Die Darstellung des Teufels in der christlichen Kunst* (Berlin:

everybody by their monster-like appearance: with their horns, claws, wings, tails, grimaces and open mouths, etc. (fig. 5).<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 5: Devils as tormenting monsters

Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1931); Germain Bazin, "The Devil in Art," in *Witchcraft and Demonology in Art and Literature*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1992), 25-43 [repr. from *Satan*, ed. Bruno de Jesus-Marie (London: Sheed and Wand, 1951), 351-67]; Leander Petzoldt and Siegfried de Rachewiltz, ed., *Der Dämon und sein Bild* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Verlag Peter Lang, 1989), with the chapter by Helmut Hundsichler, "Der Dämon im Bildzeugnis des Mittelalters" (1-18); Erzsébet Tatai, "An Iconographical Approach to Representations of the Devil in Medieval Hungary," in *Christian Demonology and Popular Mythology*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 54-71.

- <sup>12</sup> Saint Anthony tormented by devils, panel painting of a winged altarpiece, Joseph Koler, 1480/90. Kaufbeuren (Swabia), daughter church of Saint Blaise. – Such an appearance of the devil may have been perceived differently by the beholders of images than by the audience of a drama, where he may have provoked laughter; see Angelica Axelsen, *Supernatural Beings in the French Medieval Dramas with Special Reference to the Miracles of the Virgin* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard Publishers, 1923), 58: "... If we add to this that as a rule he appeared with horns in his forehead, in a hairy skin with a tail and other animal equipment, his grotesque figure was bound to inspire merriment."

But, as Béla Zsolt Szakácz shows well in his paper, there were also many devils in disguise, hidden in the bodies of other familiar beings,<sup>13</sup> for instance, animals, beautiful and wealthy women, children, learned men, hermits, etc. They were often only recognizable by some small details of their appearance, most frequently their devilish feet or hands (fig. 6),<sup>14</sup> or even only through the knowledge of the story in which they appeared. This can also be seen as a didactic message and warning to the beholders to check carefully in any communication with others whether they bore any signs of the ‘under-natural,’ as Alexander Makhov calls the demonic sphere in his contribution:<sup>15</sup> The devil, being able to hide himself under the mask of any type of being, was able to turn up in ways that one did not expect.



Fig. 6: The temptation of Christ by Satan disguised as a pious hermit; in his outward appearance he is only clearly recognizable by his feet

<sup>13</sup> See also the chapter “The Devil Appearing in the Form of Someone Else,” in Tatai, “An Iconographical Approach,” 62-5.

<sup>14</sup> Temptation of Christ by Satan, panel painting of a winged altarpiece, Master of Schloss Liechtenstein, before 1450. Vienna, Österreichische Galerie, Inv. 4778.

<sup>15</sup> See p. 29 in this volume.

This phenomenon of visual disguise not only touched wide audiences in the public space of the messages of panel paintings and wall paintings in churches. Scientific treatises or encyclopedias and their illustrations could remind their readers of the actions of the ‘under-natural’, as in an example in the *Hortus Sanitatis* from the end of the fifteenth century. There, one finds the *Draconopes* (fig. 7) and its description, with reference to the *Liber de Natura rerum* of Thomas de Cantimpré and to The Venerable Bede: *Draconopedes serpentes sunt magni et potentes facies virgineas habentes humanis similes in draconum corpus desinentes. Credibile est huius generis illum fuisse per quem dyabolus Evam decepit: quod (sicut dicit Beda) virgineum vultum habet.*<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 7: The *Draconopes* in the *Hortus Sanitatis*

<sup>16</sup> *Hortus Sanitatis* (Strassburg: Johannes Prüss d. Ä., 1497), *Tractatus de animalibus*, cap. xlix. See Thomas Cantimpratensis, *Liber de natura rerum*, editio princeps secundum codices manuscriptos, part 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 283. For the *Draconpes* see also J. K. Bonnell, “The Serpent with a Human Head in Art and in Mystery Play,” in *Witchcraft and Demonology in Art and Literature*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1992), 113–49 [repr. from *American Journal of Archaeology* 21 (1917): 255–91]; Henry Ansgar Kelly, “The Metamorphoses of the Eden Serpent during the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” in *ibidem*, 225–56 [repr. from *Viator* 2 (1972): 301–28]; Marcel van der Voort, *Van serpente met venine. Jacob van Maerlant's over slangen bertaald en van herpetologisch commentaar voorzien* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 1993), 85–8; idem, *Dat seste boec van serpente: een onderzoek naar en een uitgave van boek VI van Jacob van Maerlants Der naturen bloeme* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2001), 112–3.



But the *Draconopes* not only appeared in theological treatises and scientific encyclopedias, but also in the public space of churches, like in a wall painting in the South Tyrolean community of Klerant representing the serpent, the seduced Eve and her followers (fig. 8).<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 8: Eve and the devil disguised as a serpent with the face of a virgin:  
the *Draconpes* in the public space of a wall painting

Supernatural and preternatural entities and phenomena generally turned up in texts and visual representations as a combination of well-known natural beings, objects, actions, and realities combined in an abnormal or, at least unusual, way. They were also found especially in the occurrence of miraculous divine signs that had become most important and popular by the turn of the fifteenth century. *De signis, portentis atque prodigiis tam antiquis quam novis cum eorundem typis et figuris*, an illustrated manuscript written

<sup>17</sup> Eve and her followers (as a contrasting image to that of the Virgin and her followers), wall-painting, surroundings of Leonhard of Brixen, c. 1480. Klerant (South Tyrol), daughter church of St. Nicholas.

in 1503 by Jacob Mennel (*Manlius*), one of Emperor Maximilian I's court historiographers, can be understood as such a contribution to "humanist spiritualism."<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 9: Crosses on clothing

There are, for example, festive dancing couples made aware of their vanity when the divine sign of crosses appeared on their clothing (fig. 9).<sup>19</sup> The sins of mankind are also shown with the help of crosses that appeared on the clothes of two other couples connected with the obscured sun and blood rain (fig. 10), the latter particularly popular in texts and images from the first half of the sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Also the *lapis grandis cum imagine sancte crucis et Cristi cum aureo titulo*, that is, a large stone with the image of the crucified Christ and a golden inscription falling from the sky, called attention to the sinfulness of mankind (fig. 11).<sup>21</sup> All of these depicted phenomena and events are

<sup>18</sup> Vienna, Austrian National Library, cod. 4417\*. Concerning Jacob Mennel see Wolfgang Irtenkauf, "Jakob Mennel – Hofgenealogie Maximilians I.," in *Literatur und bildende Kunst im Tiroler Mittelalter. Die Iwein-Fresken von Rodeneck und andere Zeugnisse der Wechselwirkung von Literatur und bildender Kunst*, ed. Egon Kühlebacher (Innsbruck: Institut für Germanistik, 1982), 53–66; Tanja Reinhardt, "Die habsburgischen Heiligen des Jakob Mennel," phil. Diss. (Freiburg i. Br.: Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, 2002), esp. 63.

<sup>19</sup> Mennel, *De signis*, fol. 19r: *Hic in vestibus aliorum hominum cruces apparent*. For such appearances of crosses in the period after 1500 see the short contribution by Anja Eisenbeiß, "Unheilvolle Zeichen. Bilder geben unfassbaren Phänomenen Gestalt," *Ruperto Carola* 3 (2007): 43–4 (also <http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/presse/ruca/ruca07-3/kurz.html>; last access Dezember 30, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Mennel, *De signis*, fol. 8v: *Sol obscuratus, signum crucis in vestibus hominum et sanguis de celo proflucit etc.* Concerning blood rain see Alexander Sperl, "Vom Blutregen zum Staubfall. Der Einfluß politischer und theologischer Theorien auf die Wahrnehmung von Umweltphänomenen," in *Umweltbewältigung. Die historische Perspektive*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Verena Winiwarter (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1994), 56–76.

<sup>21</sup> Mennel, *De signis*, fol. 11v.

combinations of common situations, objects or entities in an uncommon way: the obscured sun, the crosses on clothing; raining blood; the picture of the Crucified Christ falling from the sky, etc. The supernatural or preternatural was represented visually as natural objects or entities in odd connections, combinations, or extensions. They show that there is no image of the supernatural outside the context of natural entities.



Fig. 10: Crosses on clothing and blood rain

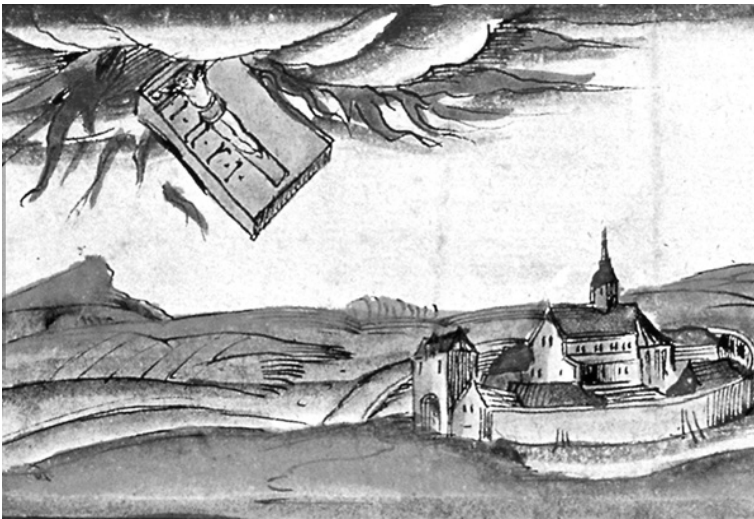


Fig. 11: A large stone with the image of the crucified Christ falling from the sky

In summary: With the few examples and patterns that I have chosen I wanted to show that late medieval pictures of supernatural beings, phenomena, actions, and objects could or even should represent or communicate closeness as well as distance to their beholders, depending on the respective contexts. Such context-bound situations are certainly detectable in any kind of late medieval (visual or non-visual) representations.<sup>22</sup> For images of the supernatural, however, this had special importance with a variety of different levels and possibilities. On the one hand, recognizability played an important role. On the other hand, particularly in the cases of negative representatives of the supernatural, the aspect of disguise could be emphasized, which also operated as a didactic warning of the beholder. In both cases, the communication of the audience with or against the depicted supernatural entities was to be encouraged, to receive support from heavenly representatives, and to combat devilish beings. Thus, the visual representations of supernatural entities can be seen as relevant parts of the natural space of late medieval society.

All images: Institut für Realienkunde, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems/Donau (Austria)

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<sup>22</sup> See Gerhard Jaritz, "Nähe und Distanz als Gebrauchsfunktion spätmittelalterlicher religiöser Bilder," in *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter. Politisch-soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, körperliche Ausdrucksformen*, ed. Klaus Schreiner (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002), 331-46.

... IN DIVERSAS FIGURAS NEQUITIAE:  
THE DEVIL'S IMAGE FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF RHETORIC

Alexander E. Makbov

This article deals with some features of the devil's visual image which might be regarded as, at least, unnatural. But "unnatural" is a negative definition: if these visual features do not belong to "nature", then to what type or level of existence do they belong? We are inclined to believe that all that is not "nature" may be seen as "supernatural"; but can one really say with good reason that the devil is supernatural? We have to keep in mind when discussing a problem of the supernatural in medieval culture that we are in danger of introducing an idea which, in its modern understanding, was alien to this culture.

Medieval scholars used the term *supernaturalis*, but its meaning differed from what we now mean by "supernatural". For us, "supernatural" means something like the opposite of nature, something that lies outside nature's borders. For medieval thinkers, on the contrary, *supernaturalis* was closely connected with nature: *supernaturalis* was, so to speak, an absolutely natural continuation of nature – or, alternatively, "natural" was quite a natural continuation of *supernaturalis*. In any case, natural and supernatural were not opposed notions; they rather completed each other. As John Scotus Erigena said, "God, who is supernatural, comes before nature" (*Deus, qui supernaturalis est, praecedit naturam*).<sup>1</sup> Nature follows the supernatural, their relation can be described as a mutual complement, not an opposition or contradiction.

Describing the situation in semiotic terms, one can say that nature provides signs of the supernatural, or, according to the famous statement of Hugh of Saint Victor, "everything in nature talks of God" (*omnis natura Deum loquitur*).<sup>2</sup> From this point of view, natural and supernatural are two levels of one and the same language: the natural functions as the sign; the supernatural functions as the signified.

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<sup>1</sup> Joannes Scotus Erigena, *Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem S. Dionysii*, cap. X (Patrologia Latina 122, col. 228).

<sup>2</sup> Hugo de S. Victor, *Eruditio didascalica*, lib. VI, cap. 5 (Patrologia Latina 176, col. 805).

Thus, to think within the opposition of natural and supernatural means to oversimplify a picture which in fact is much more complicated. In the medieval imagination the supernatural was incorporated into a vertical scheme; normal reality could be compared to a certain surface which lay in the middle of a vertical axis, the supernatural lay *above* this surface – not *beyond* it, as for modern man. But there was one more level that lay *beneath* normal reality: all phenomena that belong to the demonic sphere. For want of a better term I shall call this level the “under-natural”. The system of these three levels is characterized by an increase of order from the bottom upwards: the supernatural is distinguished by perfect order – the undernatural, on the contrary, is marked by almost complete loss of any order. The devil, according to Augustine, “does not stay in the tranquillity of order” (*in ordinis tranquillitate non mansit*);<sup>3</sup> he is not only alien to the order of the universe, but he also tries to destroy this order. As Fulgentius said, the devil “fled from undisturbable tranquillity and now is in service of disturbance” (*illam imperturbabilem requiem fugerat, deinceps perturbationi serviret*).<sup>4</sup>

Alienation from the order of the universe is the main characteristic of the devil which differentiates him from man. But how is this alienation expressed in visual imagery? One can find this expression in the “disorder” of the devil’s body, which combines different parts of man, animals, and insects; moreover, parts of his body are often connected in a strange, unnatural way. For example, his face can be placed on his belly or elbow; his horns on his knees, his wings on his legs, and so on. Inner and outer parts of his body may be inverted, as in an example from *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis* by Jacques de Vitry mentioned by Nancy Caciola: the demon appears before an exorcist “as if with his bowels vomited out” and carrying “all his interior parts” on his shoulders as punishment.”<sup>5</sup>

All these visual distortions, however different they may seem, have a single theological meaning: as visual metaphors they express the idea of the devil’s ontological disorder, of his alienation from the order of universe. If a human’s body is “well-ordered”, a mirror of the divine order of the universe, the devil’s body is out of order; almost all parts of his body are, so to speak, “out of joint”, they are, as it were, involved in restless, irregular, unpredictable movement. It is not by chance that the devil’s face is often placed on his knees or elbows – that is, on the most unstable, most mobile parts of the human body.

Thus, the devil’s body as presented in many medieval pictures is a result of a number of operations whose purpose is to transform a certain natural order – the order of a body. A comparison with Classical rhetoric can be made since the aim of rhetoric –

<sup>3</sup> Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, lib. XIX, cap. XIII (Patrologia Latina 41, col. 641).

<sup>4</sup> Fulgentius, *Ad Monimum*, lib. I, cap. XVII (Patrologia Latina 65, col. 165).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in: Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits. Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 44.

the creation of “embellished speech” (*narratio ornata*) – also assumes the transformation of an initial natural order of speech. The idea of (*per*)*turbatio ordinis* is not alien to Classical rhetoric: *Rhetorica ad Herennium* says about the rhetorical figure of hyperbaton (*transgressio*, in Latin) that it “disturbs the order of words” (*verborum perturbat ordinem*).<sup>6</sup> But while in classical rhetoric *turbatio ordinis* was merely a technical device of *ornatio*, in Christian demonology this idea has gained ontological meaning as an expression of the devil’s extraneity to the order of the world: “Satan perverted the order (*tēn taxin antestrephe*);<sup>7</sup> demons “disturb all the things” (*turbent omnia*);<sup>8</sup> the devil “has lost the order in himself” (*in se ordinem perderet*).<sup>9</sup> The definition of a rhetorical figure as a “form of speech which is remote from the common and ordinary order” (*ratio*)<sup>10</sup> when applying to the devil becomes a metaphor expressing the very essence of the devil’s situation in the world: the devil is remote from the world’s order just as a rhetorical figure is remote from the natural order of speech.

To express the devil’s extraneity to order medieval art uses operations which are similar to operations used to transform “natural”, “simple” speech into embellished speech (I mean rhetorical figures and tropes). This likeness allows one to speak about a visual figure (or trope) in a quite strict sense of the word. Let us consider the case of metaphor as a kind of rhetorical trope. Quintilian and Cicero define metaphor as the transference of a word from its proper place (*ex eo loco in quo proprium est*)<sup>11</sup> to an “alien” place (*in alieno loco*)<sup>12</sup>. A similar transformation occurs in the devil’s body when, for example, his face is transferred from its natural, proper place to an improper one – to the belly or elbow. This operation transforms the natural order of the body into the unnatural – or rather “under-natural”; with good reason such operation can be called a “visual metaphor”.

An analogy between rhetorical figures and tropes, on the one hand, and visual distortions of body’s natural order, on the other hand, assumes a transfer of a rhetorical system from the verbal to the visual domain – from *verba* to *res*. Several texts demonstrate the possibility of such a transfer in medieval culture. Cicero already transported the idea of eloquence into the corporeal sphere by proposing the notion of “body eloquence” – *eloquentia corporis*.<sup>13</sup> Following in this direction, Augustine found in the world “the eloquence of things” (*eloquentia rerum*), which results in the “most pleasing” (*decentis-*

<sup>6</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*; Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der Literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*, 2 vols. (Munich: Hueber, 1960), vol. 1, 357.

<sup>7</sup> Joannes Chrysostomus, *De poenitentia*, Homilia VIII (Patrologia Graeca 49, col. 339).

<sup>8</sup> Lactantius, *Divinarum institutionum*, liber II: *De origine erroris*, cap. XVII (Patrologia Latina 6, col. 337).

<sup>9</sup> Fulgentius, *Ad Monimum*, lib. I, cap. XVII (Patrologia Latina 65, col. 165).

<sup>10</sup> *conformatio quaedam orationis remota a communi et primum se offerente ratione*. – Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 9:1:4.

<sup>11</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 8:6:5.

<sup>12</sup> Cicero, *De oratore*, 3:39:157.

<sup>13</sup> *Est enim actio quasi corporis quaedam eloquentia* – Cicero, *De oratore*, 17:55.

*simā*) of rhetorical figures – antithesis: “Just as the opposition of contraries adds beauty to speech, so the eloquence of things, instead of words, arising from the opposition of contraries, makes up the beauty of the world.”<sup>14</sup>

If “things of the world” taken together constitute something like a rhetorical figure (or figures), if a visual image is a kind of text<sup>15</sup> and statues can “be read”, as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux witnesses in his famous *Apologia* of 1125,<sup>16</sup> then a visual image of the body can also be conceived from a rhetorical viewpoint, as a certain “figure”. Arguments in favour of this assumption can be found in Hugh of Saint Victor’s manual composed for the education of novices. In the chapter entitled “About discipline which should be observed in gesture” (*De disciplina servanda in gestu*), Hugh defines a gesture as *motus et figuratio membrorum corporis*.<sup>17</sup> The word *figuratio* should be understood in a rhetorical and exegetical context: Hugh treats gestures as corporeal “figures” which are similar to figures of speech due to their ability to express certain meanings. Thus, each of six “modes” of gesture has its own special meaning: soft [gesture] signifies lasciviousness, negligent signifies carelessness (*mollis significat lasciviam, dissolutus negligentiam*), etc. Analogy between a gesture and a rhetorical (or exegetic) figure is deepened in the following passage: “Some of them [novices], figuratively expressing I don’t know what type, used to open one eye and close the other.”<sup>18</sup> Here Hugh ironically plays with exegetical terms: just as *figurae* of Bible signify certain *typi* (images), so a negligent novice with his absurd gestures tries, as it were, to denote figuratively a certain “type”.

It is worth mentioning that all these gestures are treated as *inordinati* – “disordered”;<sup>19</sup> in such a way Hugh opposes gesture to the order and tranquillity of the world: “inquietude destroys the peace of inner tranquillity.”<sup>20</sup> Disorder and inquietude of gesture manifest themselves when some organ of a body starts to fulfil the function of another organ: “First of all one must diligently observe that each organ fulfils its duty and never usurps an alien one ... One must maintain discernment of actions in his organs,

<sup>14</sup> *Sicut ergo ista contraria contrariis opposita sermonis pulchritudinem reddunt: ita quadam non uerborum, sed rerum eloquentia contrariorum oppositione saeculi pulchritudo componitur.* – Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, lib. XI, cap. XVIII (Patrologia Latina 41, col. 332).

<sup>15</sup> The analogy between the perception of an image and the reading of a text, as typical of medieval culture, was discussed by Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps des images* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 102 and passim.

<sup>16</sup> Statues and reliefs are so attractive that a monk “would rather read in marble than in books” (*magis legere libeat in marmoribus, quam in codicibus*). Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, cap. XII (Patrologia Latina 182, col. 916).

<sup>17</sup> Hugo de Sancto Victore, *De institutione novitiorum* (Patrologia Latina 176, col. 938).

<sup>18</sup> *Alii typum nescio quem figurantes, oculorum inter videndum alterum claudunt, alterum aperiant* (ibidem, col. 942).

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, col. 938.

<sup>20</sup> *per ... inquietudinem pax internae tranquillitatis dissolvitur* (ibidem, col. 940).



in order that each organ performs a function it was created for, a hand does not speak, lips do not listen, an eye does not assume the duties of the tongue.”<sup>21</sup>

A gesture is treated by Hugh as an improper “unnatural” transference of a body’s organ from its own proper function to an improper one. This transference cannot but remind one of rhetoric which treats a metaphor as a transference (*translatio*) of a word from its proper place to an improper one. Therefore, a gesture becomes, as it were, a bodily metaphor-*translatio*. It is important to notice that rhetorization of gesture is accompanied by its demonization: gesture in Hugh’s treatise is both an expressive figure and a sinful distortion of the order given by God.

A visual image of the devil becomes the meeting place of such bodily figures distorting the natural order of a body. There is one early Christian text which helps us to realise the existence of a close bond between Classical rhetoric and medieval demonic visuality. Sulpicius Severus wrote about Saint Martin: “The devil was for him so distinct and submitted to his eyes that Martin saw him in any shape, whether he remained in his proper substance or transferred himself into different figures of wickedness.”<sup>22</sup> This text is permeated with reminiscences from rhetoric. Sulpicius opposes the devil’s *propria substantia* to his *figura*: the devil can “transfer” (*transfere*) himself from *propria substantia* to *figura nequitiae*. What Sulpicius describes here is absolutely analogous to rhetorical transformation of simple, unembellished speech into embellished speech: *verbum proprium* (the term which corresponds to Sulpicius’ *propria substantia*) when transferred (*transfere* – a term appropriated by Sulpicius) into an improper place becomes a *figura* (Sulpicius also used this term). The expression *subiectum oculis* perhaps also has a rhetorical origin; it sounds like Quintilian’s definition of hypotyposis (or, in Latin terminology, *demonstratio*) – a figure of “submitting to the eyes” (*sub oculis subiectio*)<sup>23</sup>: a speaker, describing a given event in detail, forces the listener to see it with inner sight. From this definition Sulpicius takes the idea of moral force; a speaker is able to compel a listener not only to hear, but also to see – in the same way a saint is able by the force of his faith to compel the devil to appear before his eyes. To sum up, we can say with good reason that Sulpicius borrowed a set of terms from rhetoric and applied them in the domain of visual imagery.

Therefore, a visual image of the devil can be compared to highly metaphorical speech. If one compares a man’s image with plain, unembellished “visual speech” (let

<sup>21</sup> *Primum ergo diligenter observandum est, ut singula membra suum teneant officium, neque usurpent alienum ... Discretio actionum in membris conservanda est, ut scilicet id agat unumquodque membrum ad quod factum est, ut neque loquatur manus, neque os audiat, nec oculus linguae officium assumat.* – ibidem, col. 941.

<sup>22</sup> *Diabolum vero ita conspicabilem et subiectum oculis habebat ut, sive se in propria substantia contineret, sive in diversas figuras nequitiae transtulisset, qualibet ab eo sub imagine videretur.* – Sulpice Sévère, *Vie de Saint Martin*, vol. 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 298 (21:1).

<sup>23</sup> Quintilianus, *Institutio Oratoria*, 9:2:40.

us call it *imago plana*), then the devil's image may be regarded as a kind of embellished, though in some parodic way, "visual speech" (let us call it *imago ornata*).

Classical rhetoric discerns four types of alterations by which "natural" speech is changed into embellished speech.<sup>24</sup> Alteration *per adiectionem* assumes the addition of some new elements (words or combinations of words) to the "natural" utterance; in rhetorical treatises this type of alteration has sometimes been described metaphorically in architectural terms, as adding new "stones" to the "edifice" of speech. Alteration *per detractiōnem* assumes a removal of some elements from the natural order of speech. Alteration in speech *per transmutationem* assumes transposition of an element from its "proper" place to an "improper". Two main subtypes of this operation were distinguished: 1) mutual transposition of elements standing next to each other (a figure of anastrophe); 2) insertion of a certain element taken from its proper place between two other elements (a figure of hyperbaton<sup>25</sup>). In the first case the transposed element remains close to its "proper place", in the second case the transposed element is remote from it. The last type, alteration *per immutationem*, assumes a replacement of a certain element by some new element taken from outside the given speech, from some hypothetical "stock of words" (*copia verborum*<sup>26</sup>). Using the same architectural metaphor one may say that by *immutatio* some "stones" are removed from "edifice" of speech and new "stones", taken from outside, are inserted. *Immutatio* corresponds not to figures, but to tropes (metaphor, metonymy, etc.).

All these four types of the alteration of the natural order may be found in "visual speech" – in the construction of the devil's visual image. Let us begin with the last type – alteration by substitution (*immutatio*). If we take an image of a man or an angel as a starting point, as a "ground zero" of naturalness, then we shall see that an image of the fallen angel is constructed to a considerable degree by means of various substitutions: a dog's or goat's head, donkey's ears, sometimes bird's legs instead of the respective parts of a human body, numerous "borrowings" from insects' body structures, etc. The colour of a body is also subject to substitution (black or red instead of the "normal" colour).

Alteration by addition (*adiectio*) occurs mostly in a form of multiplication: the normal quantity of a certain organ of a body increases twofold, threefold, etc. Thus, demons may have four horns instead of the "normal" two (as on some miniatures from the French *Verger de soulas*, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century), numerous faces on different parts of the body, two tongues (as in the Bohemian *Codex Gigas*, 1204-1230); anthropomorphic and, at the same time, demonic Jaws of Hell may have an additional pair of eyes (in the Book

<sup>24</sup> See: Lausberg, *Handbuch*, vol. 1, chapters devoted to figures and tropes.

<sup>25</sup> This distinction between anastrophe and hyperbaton was drawn by Lausberg, *Handbuch*, vol. 1, 355-7.

<sup>26</sup> Quintilianus, *Institutio Oratoria*, 10:1:15.

of Hours of Catherine of Cleves, about 1440), the motif of standing hair on a demon's head can be repeated below, at the waist. (fig. 1).



Fig. 1: The motif of standing hair repeated below in inverted form, downward.  
Saint-Sernin de Toulouse (Pyrenees), 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century.

From: *Sculpteurs au Moyen Âge. L'univers fantastique des chapiteaux romans*  
(Clermont-Ferrant: Éditions l'Instant Durable, 2002), 20

Finally, the whole figure of the devil can be reduplicated, though his “personality” remains single. Thus, on a misericordia of choir stalls in Cologne Cathe-

dral the devil seduces Christ while assuming the appearance of two demons simultaneously.<sup>27</sup>

Alteration by removal (*detractio*) is rarer. Among the typical features of demonic imagery is a visual removal of one eye. In many scenes a demon is represented in profile, “with one eye” as it were, while other persons are depicted full face; this contraposition may be accompanied by the opposition of a number of other organs (for instance, toes) (fig. 2).



Fig. 2: The Weighing of Souls. The archangel and the devil are contrasted in the number of eyes and toes. This opposition is strengthened by the close juxtaposition of their faces and legs.

Detail of a Romanesque capital from Saujon (Charente-Maritime).  
From: *Sculpteurs au Moyen Âge. L'univers fantastique des chapiteaux romans*  
(Clermont-Ferrant: Éditions l'Instant Durable, 2002), 14

<sup>27</sup> According to the interpretation of Ulrike Bergmann in her book *Das Kölner Domchorgestühl* (Cologne: Verlag Kölner Dom, 1995), 22-3.

A demon or demonical personage may have only one leg (e.g., a monster representing the Seven Deadly Sins on a German woodcut of the fifteenth century from British Museum – his single leg symbolizes the single root of all sins), one horn instead of the normal two. The devil is often contrasted to other personages by a uniform colour; this reduction of colouring to a single simple colour could also be regarded as a kind of *detractio*.

Alteration by transposition (*transmutatio*) often accompanies an addition; thus, the addition of a head in an “improper” place may be treated at the same time as a transposition of the head. Horns (the addition of which indicates the devil’s closeness to a beast) may be transposed to knees and elbows (a combination of *adiectio* and *transmutatio*). Standing hair similar to tongues of hellish flame are sometimes transposed below and, in inverted form, become a beard. Something like a tail is placed in front of a figure (figs. 3 and 4).



Fig. 3: A demon’s standing hair (capital of Basilique Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, Vezelay, 12<sup>th</sup> century) in inverted form becomes a beard (capital of Saint-Pierre church, Aulnay-de-Saintonge, 12<sup>th</sup> century).

From: *Sculpteurs au Moyen Âge. L’univers fantastique des chapiteaux romans*  
(Clermont-Ferrant: Éditions l’Instant Durable, 2002), 66 and 19



Fig. 4: Demons try to seduce St. Augustine, detail.

Woodcut from an edition of Augustine's *City of God*, about 1486. Abbeville, Municipal Library.

From: Anne Brenon, *Les cathares. Pauvres du Christ ou Apôtres de Satan?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 25

Wings on the devil's legs may be reminiscent of the wings of the ancient God Mercury, but they are of another nature. Being originally angelic, these wings are now transposed below – at the waist or even on the legs, thus symbolizing the devil's lapse (figs. 5 and 6).



Fig. 5: Wings at the waist, serpents are substituted for inferred horns (a combination of *adiectio* and *immutatio*).  
 “Temptation of Christ,” detail. Stained glass from the Cathedral of Saint-Pierre of Troyes, about 1170-1180.

From: Jacques LeGoff, *Un Moyen Âge en images* (Paris: Éditions Hazan, 2007), 109

Transposition as a kind of *turbatio ordinis* may be applied not only to the single figure of the devil, but to a whole picture as well. A sculpture on Notre-Dame de Paris’ Judgement Door depicting a demon who sitting on a bishop represents such a *turbatio*:

the vertical hierarchy of the world is violated, the devil comes upward instead of staying below.



Fig. 6: Wings are on the legs. Satan riding on Behemoth. North of France, beginning of 12<sup>th</sup> century, Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Library.

From: Robert Bartlett, ed., *Le Monde medieval* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 81

The visual *figurae* produced by means of all these operations are often involved in an interplay of correlations and analogies which endow the syntax of a picture with symmetry similar to the symmetry of colons in a rhetorical period. This symmetry sometimes becomes quite unnatural; some parts of the body produce a symmetry which



is impossible in the natural order of a body as, e.g., a protruding tongue and a hanging ear (fig. 7).



Fig. 7: *Temptatio diaboli de vana gloria* (the devil's temptation by vainglory), detail.  
 From an *Ars moriendi* (Paris, National library, MS 6320Bis, fol. Bivo). Supposedly 15<sup>th</sup> century  
 From: Alexander Makhov, "The Devil's Naked Tongue as an Iconographical Motif,"  
*Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 53 (2006): 67

If all these *figurae* belong not only to rhetoric, but to exegetics as well, then how do they designate the devil as a certain *typus*? To answer these questions I will

dwell upon only one specific rhetorical device applied to visual images: the device of reduplication – namely, the reduplication of faces. In medieval imagery supernatural creatures never have several faces; only demonical characters, “under-natural” as it were, are distinguished by such a peculiarity (fig. 8)..



Fig. 8: A witch and the devil with additional faces on his knees. German woodcut, 15<sup>th</sup> century  
From: Gilles Néret, *Devils* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), 66

The devil’s “multifaceness” is just a visual expression of the multiplicity inherent to his nature. “My name is Legion, for we are many” – this famous sentence was understood by Church Fathers as the devil’s confession of his own nature. Multiplicity manifests itself in different aspects of demonic existence. For example, the devil has “thousand names”, he knows a “thousand ways of doing harm” – according to Virgil’s

line, which the Church Fathers adopted as a characteristic of the devil: *tibi nomina mille, mille nocendi artes*.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, this multiplicity manifests itself visually in different ways, including “multifaceness”. In his appearances the devil often splits, as it were, into several figures. Before Saint Illarion he emerged as a number of fighting gladiators;<sup>29</sup> in Saint Abraham’s cell he intruded “as a great crowd (*quasi turba plurima*)”;<sup>30</sup> in the Gallic *Life of Saint Roman* the devil presented himself “in the form of two girls” (*sub duarum puellarum forma*).<sup>31</sup>

What does this multiplicity mean as a characteristic feature of the devil? One has to remember that for medieval man the devil, as a representative of the “under-natural”, occupied the lowest place in a Great Chain of Being. According to this view, the devil’s multiplicity was never regarded as an advantage, but, on the contrary, was considered a deficiency. It is not by chance that the face was chosen from all the parts of the devil’s body as the most frequent object of multiplication – the most unique part of the body, most closely associated with individuality.

In fact, the devil lacks individuality; his multiplicity does not signify an ability “to possess many individualities,” but on the contrary, it signifies his inability “to be one and the same.” The devil is not able to exist as a unity; his illusive existence is a constant disintegration, a constant splitting into unstable varieties of “faces”. In short, the devil cannot have a face – he can have only faces.

This idea was clearly expressed in the above-mentioned Gallic *Life of Saint Roman*. When the devil had appeared to the monk Sabinian in the form of two girls, the monk “recognized one beast under the double face” (*unum nosset sub specie gemina monstrum*) and reproached the devil: “Why do you always appear before me in various forms? Don’t you feel shame since you always see me one and the same, with the help of God, and never see me in another shape?”<sup>32</sup>

Sabinian opposes his own permanence to the devil’s mutability. This mutability seems to be a kind of deficiency; the devil lacks the simple ability that any human being possesses – the ability to exist in one and the same shape, to have one and the same face. The devil’s “multifaceness” – as well as his other figures – can be regarded not only as an intrinsic quality of his nature, but also as a part of the devil’s “military strategy” – a device in his struggle against humanity. At this point the question

<sup>28</sup> *Aeneid*, 7:336. See Paul-Augustin Deproost, “Mille nocendi artes. Les préfigurations virgiliennes du mal dans la poésie des chrétiens latins,” in *Imaginaires de mal*, ed. Myriam Watthee-Delmotte and Paul-Augustin Deproost (Paris: Cerf, 2000), 55–68.

<sup>29</sup> Hieronymus, *Vita S. Hilarionis eremitae* 7 (Patrologia Latina 23, col. 32).

<sup>30</sup> *Vita sancti Abrahae eremitae* XVI, *Vitae patrum* (Patrologia Latina 73, col. 290–1).

<sup>31</sup> *Vita Sancti Romani, Vie des pères du Jura* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 298, 300.

<sup>32</sup> *Quid tu totiens mihi in diversis ingeris formis? Nempe, o stultissime, erubescis, cum me adiutum divinitus unum ac solum, nunquam videas alterum quam vidisti*, Ibidem.

of visibility has to be raised again, since the struggle between man and the devil took place in the visual domain: visibility is, as it were, “military territory” where man meets his enemy.

In this visual war man and the devil use different tactics. Man tries to hold the devil constantly in a visual field, since to see means to get control; someone who beholds devil gets control of him and, therefore, wins a victory. Thus, Saint Anthony was the credited with following words about himself: “I have seen all the devil’s traps drawn on the earth.”<sup>33</sup> According to the statement of a certain desert father, “blessed is a man who always sees his sins” (*Beatus est qui peccatum suum semper videt*).<sup>34</sup> The ideal state is described as constant visual control of the devil. In this state man always “has the devil before his eyes” (*ante oculos enim habemus adversarium nostrum*), as Saint Syncletica puts it.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, a holy man, a saint is often endowed with an ability to see the devil when he remains invisible to an ordinary man.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Saint Martin, at the hour of his death, saw the devil standing at his bed; other monks sitting around the bed of the dying saint saw nothing.<sup>37</sup>

The capacity of sight – I mean inner, spiritual sight, *oculus mentis* – is a kind of weapon in man’s struggle against the devil. Therefore, the devil, on his side, tries to escape this visual control by deceiving man with false images (phantasma, simulacra, visions, etc.).

In medieval imagery, to cheat a man with fallacious illusions means to make him “blind”. At this point I have to introduce the important opposition of vision and blindness. The Saint or righteous man is characterized by an unlimited capacity for vision; according to Gregory the Great, for righteous men in paradise “there would be nothing in nature that they could not see” (*nihil in creatura agitur quod videre non possint*).<sup>38</sup> Unlike the holy man, the devil is characterized as spiritually “blind”. Origen was probably the first Christian thinker who connected evil with blindness; the devil is at the same time “evil” (*poneros*) and “blind” (*tuflos*).<sup>39</sup> What is meant here is not physical blindness, but rather the devil’s inability to participate in the constant, endless and absolute mutual vision that unites God, angels, and righteous men.

The fall of the devil is described metaphorically as an eclipse, obscuration, a loss of sight. “Where the devil had exalted against God, there he was abandoned by

<sup>33</sup> *Antonii Magni Sententiarum expositio* (Patrologia Graeca 40, col. 1089).

<sup>34</sup> *Verba seniorum* (Patrologia Latina 73, col. 968).

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, col. 896.

<sup>36</sup> Thus, the Cistercians interpreted “demon-vision” as “a spiritual gift conferred by God upon the worthy” [Tom Licence, “The Gift of Seeing Demons in Early Cistercian Spirituality,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 39 (2004): 52].

<sup>37</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Epistula* 3, 15-17; Sulpice Sévère, *Vie de Saint Martin*, 342.

<sup>38</sup> Gregorius I, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, lib. II, hom. 40 (Patrologia Latina 76, col. 1309).

<sup>39</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* I, 61; Origène, *Contre Celse* (Sources chrétiennes 132) (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 242.

God and became blind,” Augustine says.<sup>40</sup> The devil, the main “blind person,” who lost forever any access to the vision of God, tries to make man “blind” as well. According to Peter Chrysologus, the devil “taught explorers of the world to see nothing” (*speculatores mundi docuit nihil videre*).<sup>41</sup> Conversion to the devil is described metaphorically as making one blind; the devil “can blind the hearts of those who begin to serve him” (*diabolus ... potest ... obcaecare corda eorum qui conarentur servire ei*), as Iraeneus said.<sup>42</sup>

Taking into account the connection between the ideas of the devil’s deceit and blindness inflicted by the devil, one may come to a paradoxical conclusion: a man who beholds images produced by the devil actually sees nothing. “To see” in this case means “to be blind.” Such is the main antinomy of visual relations between man and the devil. But what really happens when a man encounters a demonic vision? From a psychological point of view he just sees something deceiving, or, as Lactantius puts it, demons “cheat men’s eyes with blinding delusions” (*visus hominum praestigiis obcaecantibus fallunt*).<sup>43</sup>

From the point of view of visual rhetoric the situation can be interpreted in another way. The devil presents a man with certain visual metaphors (*figurae*) – a kind of riddles that man either can or cannot solve. Jesus Christ acted in much the same way when he displayed his own fleshly image as a kind of metaphor or riddle, which the devil failed to solve. Hiding his divinity in flesh as in the visual riddle and therefore using flesh as visual trope of divinity,<sup>44</sup> Jesus Christ, according to Saint Ambrose, committed “a pious fraud” (*pia fraus*).<sup>45</sup> The widespread comparison of flesh with a veil (*velamen, integumentum*) that hides the divinity of Christ<sup>46</sup> cannot but remind one of the medieval poetical concept of the *integumentum* as a false story that hides truth: “Many truthful things are hidden under a fallacious tegument” (*plurima sub falso tegmine vera latent*), said Theodulfus of Orleans.<sup>47</sup>

Being the matter of visual rhetoric, the struggle between man and the devil takes the form of metaphorical exchange: man and the devil act as exegetes, trying to interpret the visual figures presented to each other. The devil’s tactics in the moment of this visual encounter is quite simple: the devil tries to persuade a man that all fantastical

<sup>40</sup> ...ubi contra Deum exaltatur, ibi ab illo deseritur, et in se tenebratur, Augustinus, *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*, lib. 1, cap. XV (Patrologia Latina 42, col. 615).

<sup>41</sup> Petrus Chrysologus, *Sermo XCVI* (Patrologia Latina 52, col. 470).

<sup>42</sup> Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les hérésies* V, 24, 3 (Sources chrétiennes 153) (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 302, 304.

<sup>43</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones*, lib. II, cap. 15 (Patrologia Latina 6, col. 332).

<sup>44</sup> To make the analogy between visual and verbal tropes more precise, we may compare Christ’s fleshly image to a figure of irony – a trope which “means quite contrary to what is expressed” (*quo contraria ostenduntur*) (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 8:6:54).

<sup>45</sup> Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, lib. IV.16 (Patrologia Latina 15, col. 1617).

<sup>46</sup> For example, Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Oratio XI, In sanctum baptismum* X (Patrologia Graeca 36, col. 370-1); Leo Magnus, *Sermo LXIX*, cap. IV (Patrologia Latina 54, col. 378: *carnis velamine Deus ... tegebatur*). This image goes back to the Apostle Paul (*Ad Hebraeos*, 10:20).

<sup>47</sup> Theodulfus Aurelianensis, *De libris quos legere solebam* (Patrologia Latina 105, col. 331).

visions he produces are true, that visual image and truth are the same things. Appearing to Saint Martin in the shape of Jesus Christ, the devil addresses the doubting saint with these remarkable words: “Martin, why are you doubting? Believe, when you see! I am Jesus Christ” (*Martine, quid dubitas? Crede, cum videas! Christus ego sum*).<sup>48</sup>

“Believe, when you see” – these words of the devil express the very essence of his visual tactics. Using the terms of visual rhetoric one can describe the situation in the following way: the devil tries to convince a man that his demonic visions are not metaphors, that they correspond to reality and therefore have “literal meaning”. To win over the devil means to realize that all his visions are nothing but metaphors of his wickedness.

One can conclude that the devil’s *figurae* were regarded as visual metaphors, as, so to speak, “figures of visual speech.” A literal understanding of these metaphors leads a man to failure in his struggle with the devil. A man has to overcome this multiplicity of the devil’s metaphorical images, he has to realize them as teguments of the devil’s true face, his *propria substantia*. An exact formulation of this idea appears in Priscillian’s *Apology*: “For whatever shapes, forms, or names the devil changes himself into, we know that he can be nothing else but the devil... whether he is regarded as a beast... or a serpent or a dragon, we know that he is the devil.”<sup>49</sup>

This proper face of the devil in the terrestrial world is hidden; very few of the elected, such as Saint Martin, are able to behold it. But in paradise this real face will become a joyful spectacle for all righteous men: “What a spectacle it will be, when this awful beast becomes visible to the eyes of all the elected,” Gregory the Great anticipates the pleasure.<sup>50</sup> The Last Judgement will put an end to the devil’s *diversa figura*, to his “multifaceness”; the devil will lose the ability “to be many” and take on his proper face, final and ultimate.

In this article, the figure of the devil is closely associated with the idea of embellishment (*ornatus, ornamentum*). This association may seem quite strange: How can one think of the devil as something “embellished” or even “embellishment”? But we have to remember that the understanding of evil as “decoration” of the world is deeply rooted in Christian theology, primarily in the teaching of Augustine, who treated the coexistence of sinners and righteous men in one and the same world as a “rhetorical” antithesis in a system of the “eloquence of things” (*eloquentia rerum*): God “put them [sinners] at the disposal of righteous men, and thus adorned the order of the ages as if

<sup>48</sup> Sulpice Sévère, *Vie de Saint Martin*, 306 (24:6).

<sup>49</sup> Priscillian, *Apology*, 17.29-18.9; quoted in: Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic. Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 63-4.

<sup>50</sup> *O quale erit illud spectaculum, quando haec immanissima bestia electorum oculis ostendetur*; Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia*, lib. XXXIII, cap. XX (Patrologia Latina 75, col. 698).

with antitheses, as the most beautiful poem.”<sup>51</sup> For the sake of the aesthetic justification of evil Augustine also uses an analogy with painting; sinners are likened to the colour black, which just increases the beauty of a picture. “Just as a picture with the colour black, placed in its own place, is beautiful, so the universe of things, though full of sinners, is nevertheless beautiful.”<sup>52</sup> Gregory the Great developed this idea when he maintained that the contemplation of sinners’ torments in hell can but increase the joy of righteous men in Paradise:

It is no wonder that righteous men, seeing the torments of sinners, thereby get an addition to their enjoyments, just as in a picture a black-coloured ground serves to make white or red clearer.<sup>53</sup>

From all these speculations one can easily draw an erroneous conclusion that sinners were created exclusively for “decoration” of the world and for righteous men’s good. Prosper of Aquitaine was forced to clarify Augustine’s opinion, refuting those who had found in Augustine’s writings the idea that “certain men are created by God not for eternal life, but for decoration of the present age and for usage by others.”<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the understanding of sinners (*mali*) as decoration, embellishment of the world, continued to exist in its naïve form. Thus, Honorius of Autun in *Elucidarium* asks why God created the angels who had to become demons if he had foreseen their future lapse. His answer is the following: “For the sake of the embellishment of his creature. Just as a painter uses black-coloured ground to make white and red more precious, so righteous men get more brightness due to comparison with evil ones.”<sup>55</sup> St. Bonaventura found a new formula for the expression of the same idea: *malum auget decorem in universo* – “evil increases the adornment of the world.”<sup>56</sup>

One of the antinomies of Christian demonology deals with the relation of, on the one hand, the devil is extraneous to any order, on the other hand, the devil is already “well-ordered”, submitted to order – he even serves to maintain the order of

<sup>51</sup> ...eos bonorum usibus commodaret atque ita ordinem saeculorum tamquam pulcherrimum carmen etiam ex quibusdam quasi antithetis honestaret. Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, lib. XI, cap. XVIII (Patrologia Latina 41, col. 332).

<sup>52</sup> ...sicut pictura cum colore nigro, loco suo posita, ita universitas rerum ... etiam cum peccatoribus pulchra est. Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, lib. XI, cap. XXIII (Patrologia Latina 41, col. 336).

<sup>53</sup> Quid autem mirum si dum justi iniustorum tormenta conspiciunt, hoc eis veniat in obsequium gaudiorum, quando et in pictura niger color subternitur, ut albis vel rubens clarius videatur. Gregorius Magnus, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, lib. II, homil. 40 (Patrologia Latina 76, col. 1309).

<sup>54</sup> ...quidam homines non ad hoc a Deo creati sunt, ut vitam adipiscerentur aeternam: sed ut habitum tantommodo saeculi praesentis ornarent, et ad utilitatem nascerentur aliorum. Prosper Aquitanus, *Pro Augustino responsiones ad capitula gallorum* (Patrologia Latina 51, col. 173).

<sup>55</sup> Cum Deus praesciret eos tales futuros, quare creavit eos? – Propter ornamentum sui operis. Ut enim pictor nigrum colorem subternit, ut albus vel rubens pretiosior sit, sic collatione malorum iusti clariiores fiunt. Honorius Augustodunensis, *Elucidarium*, lib. I. 8 (Patrologia Latina 172, col. 1115).

<sup>56</sup> Sanctus Bonaventura, *Commentaria in quatuor libros sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*. “Primi libri commentarius in distinctionem” XLVI (art. I, qu. V), in Sanctus Bonaventura, *Opera Omnia* (Ad Claras Aquas: Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882), vol. 1, 830.

the universe.<sup>57</sup> This antinomy fully manifested itself in the visual rhetoric of demonic imagery, where embellishment, the *figura* has a twofold meaning. The devil's *figurae* at the same time express his hostility to order as well as his inner disorder and fulfil the function of embellishment inherent to rhetorical figures, thereby "ordering" the devil, involving him in the "beauty" of the world. Inasmuch as the "disordered" devil serves the embellishment of the universe he is already "put in order." One can assume that this same paradox is expressed in the famous words of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux about the decoration of Romanesque cathedrals and monasteries, where demonic imagery has an important place: "deformed beauty and beautiful deformity" (*deformis formositas, ac formosa deformitas*).<sup>58</sup>

Combined with images of holiness, the devil's *figurae* with their deformity and disorder constitute that Augustinian antithesis which creates universal beauty. One can barely perceive this beauty in cruel reality, but it becomes evident in the ideal space of book illumination or cathedral decoration. A cathedral is a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem, where, according to John Scotus Erigena, "ugliness is not ugly, wickedness does not harm, error does not err." "Wickedness of impure spirits or unwise emotions of impious men," Erigena goes on, "not only do not corrupt its beauty, but rather increase it."<sup>59</sup>

Beauty in its medieval understanding is someway polyphonic, it consists of at least two contrapuntal voices – or, as Erigena said, "beauty can be produced only by joining of similar und dissimilar, contraries and oppositions." In this polyphonic system the Bad, inasmuch as it serves as a comparison to the Good, stressing its brightness, does not deserve any blame: "Evil taken as such should be blamed; but when it serves as a comparison helping to praise the Goodness, it is not blameable."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> This antinomy was formulated by Julian of Eclanum in the form of a paradox which is rendered by Augustine as follows: "If a decently ordered thing participates in God and if a thing which participates in God is good, then, therefore, to obey the devil is good, because this obedience serves the order established by God. It hence follows that the struggle against the devil is iniquity, because due to this struggle the order established by God is violated" (*Si res quae decenter ordinata est, ad Deum pertinet, et res quae ad Deum pertinet, bona est; bonum est itaque subditum esse diabolo, quoniam institutus a Deo per hoc ordo servatur. Sequiturque ut malum sit rebellare diabolo, quoniam per resultationem institutus a Deo ordo turbatur*). Augustinus, *Contra Julianum, haeresis Pelagiana defensorem*, lib. VI, cap. XX (Patrologia Latina 44, col. 863).

<sup>58</sup> Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, cap. XII (Patrologia Latina 182, col. 916). – Thomas Dale suggests a psychological explanation for the "monsters" of Romanesque cloisters: they helped the monk expose his "inner demons and the phantasms" to the light; Thomas Dale, "Monsters, Corporeal Deformities, and Phantasms in the Cloister of St-Michel-de-Cuxa," *Art Bulletin* 83 (2001): 429-30.

<sup>59</sup> ...in qua nullius turpitudine turpis est, nec malitia nocet, nec error errat, cuius pulchritudinem immundorum spirituum nequitia, seu hominum impiorum irrationabiles motus non solum non contaminant, verum etiam adaugent. Joannes Scotus Erigena, *De divisione naturae*, lib. V. 36 (Patrologia Latina 122, col. 982).

<sup>60</sup> Nulla enim pulchritudo efficitur, nisi ex compaginatione similium et dissimilium, contrariorum et oppositorum... Ideoque quod malum dicitur, dum per se consideratur, vituperatur; dum vero ex ejus comparatione bonum laudatur, non omnino vituperabile videtur. Ibidem.



Returning to the notion of *ornamentum*, we can now state that it included not only the goodness in all of its manifestations, but aesthetically justified evil as well. In the same way the flesh, a cause of sufferings during earthly life, when resurrected will become, according to Augustine, an *ornamentum*: “What now is for you a torment, then will become a decoration (*ornamentum*).”<sup>61</sup> But in the devil’s *figurae* torment immediately, even under the gaze of a spectator, becomes a decoration: *tormentum* and *ornamentum* are inseparably intermingled.

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<sup>61</sup> *Quae nunc tibi facit tormentum, postea tibi erit ornamentum.* Augustinus. *Sermo CCXI. In diebus Paschalibus*, XI (Patrologia Latina 38, col. 1132).



## DEVILS IN VISUAL PROXIMITY

*Helmut Hundsbiehler*

Considering cultural phenomena of the past we must take into account possible differences between nowadays' views and the views which were relevant in the past. This topical ethnological postulate might meanwhile be taken as dispensable, but I want to affirm it here because the need for that differentiation becomes evident particularly with regard to medieval discourses related to the supernatural. For instance, it would be inadequate to assign medieval discourses on the supernatural straightforwardly to superstition or to magic, because we have to consider as supernatural both the demonical sphere and the divine sphere. For Christianity they are interdependent: Christian theodicy indispensably rests upon the devil.<sup>1</sup> If we compare the medieval myth of the devil with the emergence of many other medieval myths, especially with the myths of Christian saints, the involvement of the devil is pre- and superordinate, and the belief in the devil led to highly real enterprises like palpable persecutions of heresy and sorcery.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we should rather keep in mind that medieval discourses on the supernatural were integrated into broader medieval religious ideas and discourses, and that they subsequently influenced medieval secular thinking and secular life, too. In a way which became fundamental for the Middle Ages, the characteristic interference of the religious, demonical, and secular spheres was codified by Saint Augustine (354-430). He concedes the devil manifold influence on the secular world and normal life (*civitas terrena* and *civitas diaboli*), whereas all those who act on Christian instruction are assigned to the *civitas Dei*

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, "Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter," in *Der Hexenhammer. Entstehung und Umfeld des Malleus maleficarum von 1487*, ed. Peter Segl (Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1988), 151-75 (here: 170).

<sup>2</sup> Günther Mahal, "Der Teufel. Anmerkungen zu einem nicht allein mittelalterlichen Komplex," in *Dämonen, Monster, Fabelwesen*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Werner Wunderlich (St. Gall: UVK Fachverlag für Wissenschaft und Studium, 1999), 495-529 (here: 495).

(and *civitas caelestis*).<sup>3</sup> In line with this paradigm, medieval towns, for instance, demonstrated their “political correctness”: The spirit of Saint Augustine’s *civitas Dei* (as typified by the idea of the Heavenly Jerusalem) recurs in self-conceptions and self-performances of municipal governments<sup>4</sup> as well as in the spirit of their legislative language; civic normative texts regulating public order all used the same vocabulary that was current in the catalogue of the deadly sins/vices.<sup>5</sup>

All these contexts grant the devil a close pragmatic presence in the discourses which determined medieval everyday life; as a historical phenomenon, the devil in no way occurs as a constant.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the Middle Ages, and also with regard to the devil’s proximity, three basic periods and inputs can be discerned:<sup>7</sup> The Old Testament rarely resorts to the devil and lets Satan actually be the Lord’s ally, whereas in the New Testament the devil occurs “nearly on every page”<sup>8</sup> and explicitly as the Lord’s antagonist who by all means aspires to sabotage salvation and even dares to tempt Jesus. The New Testament even grants the devil an inescapable influence on the world, for instance: “We know we emanate from the Lord, but all the world lies within the devil’s sphere of control.”<sup>9</sup> From here specifically resulted the horrible characterization of the devil which Christian patristics in late antiquity outlined and passed on to the Middle Ages. Thirdly, innumerable shapes of devils and demons emerged from former pagan gods and spirits which had been adopted by Christian missionary acculturation during the early medieval period. By this process alone an amazing plurality of demonical embodiments and representations was introduced after definite determinations of the devil’s appearance and physiognomy had been missing before. In sum, “the primary components of Christian diabolology in the medieval period are patristic, scholastic, and mystical theory; art, literature, and drama; popular religion, homiletics and saints’ lives;

<sup>3</sup> Aurelius Augustinus, *De civitate dei* (413/426), lib. XIV, cap. XXVIII (*De qualitate duorum civitatum, terrenaе atque caelestis*); English edition: *The City of God against the pagans*, ed. Robert W. Dyson (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Wilfried Ehbrecht, “Überall ist Jerusalem,” in *Die Stadt als Kommunikationsraum. Beiträge zur Stadtgeschichte vom Mittelalter bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Helmut Bräuer and Elke Schlenkrich (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2001), 139–85.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions. A History of Sumptuary Law* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Maslowski, *Das theologische Untier. Der sogenannte Teufel und seine Geschichte im Christentum* (Berlin: IBDK Verlag, 1978); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer. The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); idem, *Biographie des Teufels. Das radikal Böse und die Macht des Guten in der Welt* (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2000); Dinzelsbacher, “Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter”; Stephan Jankowski, *Schwarz-Weiß-Rot. Die Evolution des Teufels und sein Erscheinungsbild im Mittelalter* (Giessen: Kletsmeier, 1997); Gustav Roskoff, *Geschichte des Teufels. Eine kulturhistorische Satanologie von den Anfängen bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (reprint Stuttgart: Parkland Verlag, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> See Mahal, “Der Teufel,” 497–504.

<sup>8</sup> Roskoff, *Geschichte des Teufels*, vol. 1, 199.

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 5:19.

and folklore,”<sup>10</sup> naturally together with the New Testament. After that the whole Middle Ages were seen as a period in which Christianity dreaded the devil more than the Lord,<sup>11</sup> and in which demonology ranked high among the concerns of faith. For medieval Christians the devil was present throughout their lifetimes, bothering and threatening them.<sup>12</sup> Any marginal misconduct could be interpreted as a “doorway for the devil.”<sup>13</sup> In respect of the devil’s proximity perhaps Salvianus of Marseilles (fifth century) was among the first to state: *ubique daemon*. Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1274) warns in an even wider sense that “anything which is earthly can be performed by the devil.” And though Martin Luther (1483-1546) denied the veneration of Christian saints he nevertheless maintained just the belief in the devil.<sup>14</sup>

I would not rate commingling the singular “devil” and the plural “devils” as imprecision after the Bible lets the devil state about himself that “we are many” (*legio*).<sup>15</sup> For similar reasons I will disregard differentiations between terms like “devil(s)” or “demon(s)” or names, impersonations, and functions of any other religious symbols of the ill and evil as, for example, the serpent. Although in a grammatical sense the term “devil” is singular it comprises a vast plurality of demonical imaginations, personifications, functions, and meanings.<sup>16</sup> Medieval German evidence alone shows an enormous variety of substitution terms like dragon (*trache*), worm (*wurm*), basilisk (*básiliscus*), dog (*hunt*), buck (*bock*), blackamoor (*môr*), and so on, all of them connectable with the prefix *helle-* (“hell-”), as for example *helleküene* (“king of the hell”).<sup>17</sup> With regard to the late medieval Christian mentality, that extensive scale of both explicit and metaphorical terms indicates continuous proximity of the devil, and even striking familiarity.

Proximity is a category which depends on space and the perception of space.<sup>18</sup> Visual proximity refers to the visual sense as one among possible ways of perception. The visual proximity of devils has to be discussed even more subtly because the proximity involved here is imparted by media – even if a person refers to an “authentic” autobiographical confrontation with the devil, as for example in visions of medieval

<sup>10</sup> Russell, *Lucifer*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Maslowski, *Das theologische Untier*, 27; Roskoff, *Geschichte des Teufels*, vol. 1, 304.

<sup>12</sup> Mahal, “Der Teufel,” 505.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, 507.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 495, 520-3.

<sup>15</sup> Mark 5:9.

<sup>16</sup> Manfred Gerwing, “Teufel, A. II: Theologie,” in *Lexikon des Mittelalters, Studienausgabe*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart: Metzler et al., 1999), col. 578-81.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Dinzelsbacher, “Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter,” 159; Maslowski, *Das theologische Untier*, 41; Isabel Grüber, *Die Hierarchie der Teufel. Studien zum christlichen Teufelsbild und zur Allegorisierung des Bösen in Theologie, Literatur und Kunst zwischen Frühmittelalter und Gegenreformation* (Munich: Tuduv Verlag, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> On proximity and distance in late medieval visual culture, see Gerhard Jaritz, “Nähe und Distanz als Gebrauchsfunktion spätmittelalterlicher religiöser Bilder,” in *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter. Politisch-soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, körperliche Ausdrucksformen*, ed. Klaus Schreiner (Munich: Fink Verlag, 2002), 331-45.

mystics.<sup>19</sup> In principle, any kind of medieval evidence can convey any perception of devils in visual proximity. For example, the *Historiae memorabiles* by Rudolf von Schlettstadt (around 1300) refer to a Dominican monk called Otto who had embraced too much secular influence. One night Otto saw “three most horrible dark-skinned demons” (*tres demones ethiopes deterrimos*) prancing towards his bed singing: *Ottelin, Ottelin, du bist min* (“Ottelin, Ottelin, you are mine,” fig. 1).<sup>20</sup> Hereupon Otto crossed himself, ran into the chapel and invoked his patron, Saint Martin, and the Lord, and “thereby the devil took flight and backed away” (*a quo diabolus fugit et abscessit*).<sup>21</sup>

Rex Bohemie nomine Ottocarus<sup>85</sup> fratrem Predicatorum ordinis Otto<sup>86</sup> nomine consiliarium habebat, qui apud eum erat in singulari gracia, ita quod<sup>j</sup> sepius consiliis suis pro tempore sequebatur. Hic frater Otto regis occasione<sup>87</sup> tante potencie fuit, quod eum fratres Predicatores a sua libertate non poterant refrenare. Cum autem in sua libertate et pertinacia longo tempore<sup>k</sup> permansisset, quadam nocte, cum in dormitorio cum fratribus jaceret vigilans, vidit tres demones ethiopes deterrimos coream versus lectum suum ducentes, hanc cantilenam suaviter decantantes et sepius repetentes:

*f* Ottelin, Ottelin du bist min<sup>l</sup>

<sup>j</sup> Hs. quot.  
<sup>k</sup> Hs. tem- (Zeilenende) tempore.  
<sup>l</sup> Hs. mein.

Fig. 1: Visual proximity as mirrored by textual and musical evidence

The relationship recorded here recommends a bifocal perspective on visual proximity: On the one hand, like here, visual proximity is mirrored by the interplay of the devil and a protagonist involved. This kind of proximity is *given within* an item of evidence, and in respect of visual proximity I would subsume it under “representations of proximity.” On the other hand, possible proximity may also arise in the minds and emotions of the audience when they are perceiving and mentally processing any proximity displayed. This kind of proximity is *provoked by* an item of evidence, and I would subsume it under “proximity of representations.” My paper focuses on both kinds. I refer particularly to proximity which is imparted by visual media, or more exactly, by

<sup>19</sup> Dinzelbacher, “Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter,” 155-64.

<sup>20</sup> Rudolf von Schlettstadt: *Historiae memorabiles. Zur Dominikanerliteratur und Kulturgeschichte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Erich Kleinschmidt (Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1974), nr. [19], p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, 70-1.

pictures.<sup>22</sup> In Christian art, visual media normally take on and follow theological, hagiographic, and any other written precedents, above all the Bible, as well as former pictorial precedents, too.<sup>23</sup> In general, visual proximity means symbolic proximity. The late medieval period is my chronological field of interest.

Conforming to these initial points I try to explain my topic according to the *religious* point of view. This focus is facilitated by applying a semiotic definition of culture, which allows for the investigation of any possible “proximities” of devils according to their historical *meanings*.<sup>24</sup> Hence, another crucial prerequisite arises: Situations depicted must in no way be considered as solitary and self-contained fictions because medieval visual representations are displaying the devil and his possible proximity in the interest of religious *didactics*. This context demands complex attention: Religious pictures intend *salvific* repercussions for the minds and lives of their viewers.<sup>25</sup> These pictures are to show their viewers recommended ways for handling possible experiences of the devil’s unpleasant proximity.

In a didactic context the figure of the devil is above all a symbol, and thus, above all a religious symbol, which, therefore, should not be mistaken for a physical personification. Being a didactic figure, the devil can be seen as a mental construction of theological authorities,<sup>26</sup> “an imposition of ideas by the intellectual elite upon the uneducated.”<sup>27</sup> Accordingly we may define the devil as a symbol of anything ill and evil in explicit contrast to and in explicit conflict with the good principle, which is represented by the Lord and his salvific and charitable ideas. For didactic reasons, late medieval pictorial representations usually acuminate and materialize that antagonism: They show the devil’s appearance and “faces” as highly undesirable – unnatural, awful, terrible, brutal, naughty, ugly, insidious, imbecile, etc. (fig. 2).<sup>28</sup> In addition to this unpleasant appearance, the absolute uneasiness of the devil’s proximity is symbolically visualized by brute physical force or by instruments that devils use to restrain their victims and catch their souls, for example, clubs, sticks, ropes, chains, hooks, spears, nets, or vessels, etc. Unlike illustrations of Christian saints, the devil is rarely rendered apart as single figure, but predominantly within certain pictorial narratives. All these narratives provide “representations of proximity,” but for their late medieval viewers they introduced “prox-

<sup>22</sup> For practical reasons I put less emphasis on sculptures and liturgical drama.

<sup>23</sup> Dinzelsbacher, “Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter,” 162-3; Norbert H. Ott, “Teufel, C.: Ikonographie,” *Lexikon des Mittelalters, Studienausgabe*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart: Metzler et. al., 1999), col. 583-5.

<sup>24</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.

<sup>25</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l’Écriture*, vol. 1-4 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Mahal, “Der Teufel,” 499-501, 504-14.

<sup>27</sup> Russell, *Lucifer*, 299.

<sup>28</sup> Saint Geilana Abducted by Devils, panel painting from an altarpiece, c. 1470. Wartberg an der Krems (Upper Austria), parish church. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems (Austria).

imity of representations,” too. Such confrontations with devils in visual “proximity of representations” might have caused a broader scale of emotions: maybe hype and thrill around a horrifying figure, with the clandestine knowledge that it happily remains at a secure distance in pictorial fiction, or maybe the unforeseen and unwanted experience of emotional exposure which ended in temptation, distress, fear, or panic.<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 2: Demonical awfulness suggesting avoidance of proximity

<sup>29</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur. La culpabilisation en occident (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter. Teufels-, Todes- und Gotteserfahrung. Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonographie* (Paderborn, Vienna, et al.: Schöningh, 1996); Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso (ed.), *Fear and Its Representation in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2002); Annette Gerok-Reiter, Sabine Obermaier and Claudia Lauer (ed.), *Angst und Schrecken im Mittelalter. Ursachen, Funktionen, Bewältigungsstrategien*, Das Mittelalter 12/1 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007).



This scale of emotions illustrates the crucial anthropological concerns involved; insofar as the devil is a construction of theologians, so far are imaginings, perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of his visual proximity constructions of the viewers. Even if an individual is definitely experiencing an epiphany of the devil possible eyewitnesses do not notice any devil in visual proximity.<sup>30</sup>

As far as Saint Augustine has explained the antagonism of good and evil,<sup>31</sup> any proximity of the devil constitutes distance from the Lord (= sinfulness) meaning thus, maximum threat to salvation.<sup>32</sup> Resting upon the New Testament, this general and characteristic function of the devil forms the basis of Christian religious didactics, especially in regard to visual representations which symbolize the proximity of devils. Following Saint Augustine, thus, a simple formula may illustrate the vital consequence of the devil's possible proximity: the less the regard for the devil's far-reaching influence, so much higher is the danger of his very next proximity. According to this formula I will discuss below four possible kinds of the devil's proximity which are mirrored in late medieval pictures:

- "undesirable proximity" (as measured by the crucial Christian idea of salvation),
- "unnoticed proximity" (as symbolized by the figure of the fool who fully ignores the idea of salvation),
- "controlled proximity" (by which theological authorities intended to demonstrate the devil's inferior position compared to the principle of good), and
- "calculating proximity" (as shown by those who for certain reasons approach the devil).

#### "UNDESIRABLE PROXIMITY"

In the Bible, the general starting point of the devil's proximity to mankind is projected onto the Fall of Mankind due to the original sin in paradise (*peccatum originale*). In that context the devil launched his insidious strategy, which aims at mankind's fatal separation from the Lord. Proximity to the devil, thus, conforms to distance from the Lord.<sup>33</sup> In any updated application, the devil is said to employ the same principle: Any sin is rooted in an attractive promise which straightforwardly invokes acceptance and, thus, creates proximity to the devil. In the view of Christianity, however, accepting the promise includes the uttermost risk: What originally was the loss of paradise would henceforth be the loss of salvation. Therefore, I want to discuss first a category of

<sup>30</sup> Dinzelbacher, "Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter," 160-1.

<sup>31</sup> *De civitate Dei* IX, 1; 13; 19.

<sup>32</sup> In the New Testament this is the devil's characteristic function, which corresponds precisely to the notion of the ancient Greek term *diabolos*.

<sup>33</sup> The theological appellation of that separation is familiar even nowadays: sin.

proximity for which I suggest the name “undesirable proximity” of devils – undesirable as measured by its pernicious influence on the basic and crucial Christian idea of salvation. To a great extent this category comprises the devil’s “common” proximity and “normal” omnipresence in the *civitas terrena*, and in that sense it also overlaps all my other categories.

In theological view, as was repeatedly mentioned above, the primary and main platform for the devil’s interests and activities is not hell but, beforehand, any *secularly* oriented mentality or lifestyle within *real* life (= Saint Augustine’s *civitas terrena*). To inspire precautionary self-perception and self-reflection within Christianity, theologians subsumed human mentalities and misconducts in the catalogue of vices.<sup>34</sup> After vices are defined as permanent and deliberate sinfulness, each of them would prevent salvation and lead to hell, or in other words, to the unsurpassable and most immediate proximity to the devil in eternity.



Fig. 3: Vices – a careless secular life increases proximity to hell

<sup>34</sup> The mentalities and misconducts behind the vices actually mean blasphemy and sacrilege: cf. German ‘Laster’ as ‘Gottes-Lästern’ in the meaning of ‘laugh-ster’ about the Lord’s ideas.

Those interrelations between vices in normal life and damnation in eternity are displayed in a late medieval German woodcut via symbolic texts and images (fig. 3).<sup>35</sup> The picture renders seven vices and their presumable victims in uniform locomotion towards hell and the devil, although each of them emphasizes particular confidence in staying away from hell. *Superbia*, for example, (haughtiness, pride, selfishness; in medieval German *hochfart*, the elementary one among the vices, whose personification is significantly placed next to hell) trusts in staying safe and denies any interest in riding to hell (*Hochfart ich wil mich pewaren. In dein hell wil ich nicht faren*). In absolute contrast to that “blind” confidence, a visibly amused devil plays all them in with timbal and pipe (*Ich paucke und pfeiff euch allen herzyn*) and takes it for granted that his entertainment will lead them deep into hell (*mitten in dye helle meyn*).

In accordance with this reading of the medieval religious mindset, the devil’s possible proximity can be traced above all in concerns of human mentality, conduct, behaviour, and action. More precisely that means,

- in terms of any negative impact on the human mind – that is, in the form of misleading mental dispositions or mental states, and
- in terms of the resulting practical effects – that is, in the form of concrete emotions or actions, as, for example, diversified by the catalogue of vices.

In this view, the devil once more turns out to be a mental construction. The devil’s visual proximity, thus, should not be seen as *personal* proximity. It is symbolic proximity. The symbolic contiguity of the mental and the practical levels is impressively visualized in pictures illustrating the so-called “Art of Salutory Dying” (*ars moriendi*). This preventive fiction displays a number of devils who quasi seize their last-minute chance and beleaguer the deathbed, insinuating pernicious encouragements to the moribund person (scepticism and disbelief; the non-existence of hell; incitement to suicide).<sup>36</sup>

Because the devil’s effectiveness depends on his influence on human mind, Christianity rates it as a matter of individual free will<sup>37</sup> whether a person aspires to proximity with the Lord or proximity with the devil. Allocated to the long-term perspective of a human lifetime, however, this is in fact a task which commonly surpasses the power of normal individuals.<sup>38</sup> In a German single-sheet woodcarving (fig. 4),<sup>39</sup> the diabolic

<sup>35</sup> The Devil and the Seven Deadly Sins, woodcut. German, 15<sup>th</sup> century. Vienna, Graphic Art Collection Albertina. From: Eva Kimminich, *Des Teufels Werber. Mittelalterliche Lasterdarstellung und Gestaltungsformen der Fastnacht* (Frankfurt/M., Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 1986), frontispiece.

<sup>36</sup> Mahal, “Der Teufel,” 506-7; see the pictorial example quoted and commented on by Gerhard Jaritz, in *Alltag im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Harry Kühnel (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Styria Verlag, 1986), 137-8, fig. 161.

<sup>37</sup> Annemarie Pieper, “Zum Problem der Willensfreiheit im Mittelalter von Augustinus bis Erasmus,” in *Begegnungen mit dem Mittelalter in Basel*, ed. Simona Slanička (Basel: Schwabe & Co. Verlag, 2000), 209-22.

<sup>38</sup> Mahal, “Der Teufel,” 499.

influence on human freewill is symbolized and visualized by a case full of bribe money which a devil named Werrevalt is offering to a gentleman if he will join the devil's party (*willtu nach meyme wiln leben so wil ich dir dirz gelt ezu eygen geben*). Turning from the spectator's view to the picture's inverse line of vision, the pictorial sign language manifests a characteristic assessment formula to visualize the devil's proximity: Apparently for didactic reasons, this picture symbolically exploits the spatial opposition of "right vs. left" to illustrate the spiritual antagonism of "good vs. evil." The devil, as the negatively connoted figure, is placed on the picture's (heraldic) left side, opposite the Lord and Jesus Christ on the "right" (= positive) side, and as the devil uses his left hand to offer the money case so the gentleman also reaches for it with his left hand.



Fig. 4: Individual freewill may eliminate the devil's proximity

<sup>39</sup> Personification of human free will, single sheet woodcarving, early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Vienna, Graphic Art Collection Albertina. From: Wolfgang Harms, *Homo viator in vivo. Studien zur Bildlichkeit des Weges* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1970), fig. 6.

“UNNOTICED PROXIMITY”

In my second category I briefly refer to the devil in tricky disguise<sup>40</sup> because this variant might be equated a priori with “unnoticed proximity.” The devil in disguise pretends innocuous proximity, but naturally he approaches or bothers possible victims because of his usual intention to sabotage their salvation; in essence he demands defection from Christianity (fig. 5).<sup>41</sup> The didactic plot, however, adds up to the devil’s *uncovering*, in fact due to the devil’s malicious requests, and regardless of his harmless appearance. The devil’s pictorial addressees are highlighted as exemplary personalities who activate their mental and spiritual power to resist demonical advances – and their ostentatious, ideal orthodoxy lets viewers become aware of unsuspecting-looking proximity.



Fig. 5: Devils in disguise pretend innocuous proximity

<sup>40</sup> Mahal, “Der Teufel,” 508-9.

<sup>41</sup> Cyprianus Wooing Saint Justina, panel painting from an altarpiece, Pacher ambit, 1480/1500. St. Justina (Tyrol), parish church. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems (Austria).

This didactic focus shows that the devil in disguise finally does not display unnoticed proximity. Devils in whatever disguise or appearance rather symbolized one variant of their “normal” “undesirable proximity” after medieval theologians conceded the devil the skill to assume any shape arbitrarily.<sup>42</sup> The didactic intention involved also marks a crossover to the category of “controlled proximity.”



Fig. 6: A “foolish” mind is unconscious of the devil’s proximity

<sup>42</sup> See good examples quoted by Elisabeth Vavra, “Du Böser Geist, du pflegst alle Zeit lügen...,” *Das Mittelalter* 9/2 (2004): 139-54; Dinzelbacher, “Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter,” 157-62.

What the devil's "unnoticed proximity" means can be explained specifically with reference to the figure of the fool.<sup>43</sup> Like the devil, the fool should also be considered a symbolic religious figure. In Christian theological view, the fool's mind is characterized by a credo which says *Non est Deus* ("The Lord does *not* exist").<sup>44</sup> Thus, any person is foolish who is so self-centred that he/she strictly *denies* the existence of the Lord; in other words, a foolish mind is characterized by an absolute distance from the Lord. In medieval theological discourse such a mind is, clearly enough, labelled as *impietas* (impioussness, godlessness, ungodliness), and all the vices/deadly sins are defined as rooting here.<sup>45</sup> The fool's manifest distance from the Lord must be seen as an absolute proximity to the devil. The fatal fact involved is that, coincident with the above-quoted example of "blinded" *superbia*, any "foolish" person is *not conscious* of his/her proximity to the devil. This means thoughtless, improvident, unmindful proximity without further reflection. In a chapter of the moralistic satire *Narrenschiff* (Nave of Fools) by Sebastian Brant (1494), this version of the devil's proximity is symbolized by relevant textual and iconographic statements (fig. 6).<sup>46</sup> The conduct concerned is attached to the mental disposition of *superbia* (= to a "blinded" mind which is dominated by unnoticed proximity to the devil), and as a pictorial symbol of that unperceived fixation, the "Nave of Fools" introduces a gluey bracket<sup>47</sup> held by a devil, which also illustrates the devil's *habitus* of keeping inescapable hold of his victims.

The quotidian appearance of the lady involved shows once again that the constellation is meant as representative for *normal* life within the *civitas terrena*, which in a religious sense, as mentioned above, is interpreted as the common arena for the vices, that is, for devils and demons in symbolic proximity.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the category of "unnoticed proximity" also explains how substantially discourses on the devil's proximity must have affected the late medieval *private* sphere and *practical* life. Manifold references to the devil in medieval normative and legislative texts testify to such a phenomenon. This practical impact certainly meant that didactic visualizations of the devil's proximity were relevant not only in public space, for example, as wall paintings or altarpieces in churches, but

<sup>43</sup> Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Werner Mezger, *Narrenidee und Fastnachtsbrauch. Studien zum Fortleben des Mittelalters in der europäischen Festkultur* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> Psalm 52.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, a Tree of Vices (Austrian, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century) as reproduced in Helmut Hundsichler, "Im Zeichen der 'verkehrten Welt,'" in *Symbole des Alltags – Alltag der Symbole*, ed. Gertrud Blaschitz et al. (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1992), 555-70 (here: 565, fig. 3).

<sup>46</sup> From: *Das Narrenschiff. Nach der Erstausgabe (Basel 1494)* etc., ed. Manfred Lemmer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986), cap. [92]: *Überhebung der hochfart*, p. 240.

<sup>47</sup> An instrument which was commonly used for fowling.

<sup>48</sup> Some other images visualize that close involvement by means of a bellows with telescope tube. Christian didactic intentions make the devil operate the bellows symbolically to reveal that the devil blows meritless incitement into a "foolish" person's mind.

also in private space, for example, as book illustrations. Book illustrations confront viewers with very next “representations of proximity” (fig. 7).<sup>49</sup> This particular constellation gives visual proximity another quality and allows or even forces viewers to handle possible “private proximity” in another way than in public.<sup>50</sup> In two regards the present example even intensifies that “privacy of proximity.”



Fig. 7: Proximity in privacy: Symbolic evaluation via a mirror image

The illustration unmistakably assigns the devil's possible proximity to a definite kind of private residential environment and to a definite kind of lifestyle (= nobility), apparently with the intention to affect appropriate viewers. Beyond privacy, the picture

<sup>49</sup> *Der Ritter vom Turn (deutsch)* (Basel: Michael Furter, 1493), woodcarving. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz. From: Horst Kunze, *Geschichte der Buchillustration in Deutschland. Das 15. Jahrhundert*, vol. 2: *Illustrationen* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1975), plate 168. – Concerning this picture, see Rosanna Brusegan, “Femmes au miroir,” in *Diaboles et diableries. La représentation du diable dans la gravure des XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, exposition catalogue (Geneva: Cabinet des Estampes, 1976), 30–7.

<sup>50</sup> *Das Öffentliche und das Private in der Vormoderne*, ed. Gert Melville and Peter von Moos (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1998).



even alludes to intimacy as it symbolizes the devil's vain influence on costume and headdress in the mirror image of his buttocks. In the previous picture the mirror image shows the protagonist's face; this detail as well as the text indicate the "unnoticed proximity" of the devil, sitting nearby but apparently hidden. The picture and the respective text, however, announce arising awareness: Just when the noble girl was looking at her mirror image she realized the devil mooning at her (*sy ... in dem spiegel den tüfel sach jr den hyndern zeigend*). Her perception of this symbolic mirror image typifies prompt insight which is depriving the devil of 'unnoticed closeness'. For reasons of didactic indoctrination the picture underlays the devil's appearance, his body language and his meaningful mirror image with an alerting message, which a deceitful devil from his point of view surely never would issue.

#### "CONTROLLED PROXIMITY"

Despite the devil's omnipresence and his unrivalled sovereignty over the *civitas terrena* it is important to notice that in Christian theology the devil is by no way reckoned to be simply an opposite to the good principle (because an opposition would set both on equal terms). Christian theology values the good principle as *superior*,<sup>51</sup> although the devil's practical success rate would clearly show inverse proportions.<sup>52</sup> In Christian art, however, characteristic representations of devils in visual proximity intend to highlight the devil's inferiority. Basic examples are related to Saint Michael the archangel; pictures which show "Saint Michael in Combat with Satan" exploit the opposition "below vs. above" to visualize the didactic contrast "inferiority/hell vs. superiority/heaven." Following the same didactic intention, "Saint Michael Weighing Souls" exploits the opposition of "light-weight vs. heavy-weight." Neither a multitude of demons nor weighty things would exceed the weightiness of a slight but upright Christian soul (fig. 8).<sup>53</sup> This contrastive symbolic materialization illustrates in a catchy way the antithetic spiritual prospects which Christian belief provides: heavenly paradise (= eternal proximity to the Lord) vs. torments in hell (= eternal proximity to the devil).

In a more pragmatic way, the theological postulate of divine superiority vs. diabolic inferiority is highlighted by illustrations which show an exorcism or the remission of sins. Jesus Christ or a saint or a cleric acts as the Lord's agent who forces either a single anthropomorphic demon or perhaps a swarm of tiny insect-shaped *eidola*<sup>54</sup> to

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Maslowski, *Das theologische Untier*, 32; *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 3 (Freiburg im Breisgau et al.: Herder Verlag, 2006), s. v. 'Dualismus'.

<sup>52</sup> Mahal, "Der Teufel," 518-20.

<sup>53</sup> Saint Michael Weighing the Souls, wall painting, 1370/1380. Kraskovo (Slovakia), Protestant church. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems (Austria).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. the concise typology given by Dinzelbacher, "Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter," 163.

depart and thus to stop controlling a person's mind and conduct. In a reverse reading, Saint Augustine's above-mentioned formula applies here again: Distance from the devil symbolizes proximity to the Lord. In the New Testament, the "Three Temptations of Christ"<sup>55</sup> might perhaps represent the archetype of scenes which are to demonstrate the superiority of an ideal Christian mental *habitus*. Visual representations of diverse Christian saints, martyrs, and dignitaries take up the same didactic model. The message says that in close and meaningful confrontations a proper Christian mind will be stronger than the power of devils.



Fig. 8: Symbolic materialization of ineffective proximity

<sup>55</sup> Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13.

As a consequence of the inferiority imputed to them, devils and demons may even be allegorized as servants of the church – and such representations normally show them acting as displeased and frustrated servants. One such context is their symbolic function as misericords, imposts, gargoyles, etc. On misericords,<sup>56</sup> figures of demons, devils, fools, and the like are contextually involved in a provocative manner which is highly compromising for them. These figures mingle closely with real human individuals, but in an extremely pejorative, scurrilous, and contemptuous way as the misericords' users are pressing their buttocks on them. This application implies that the devil is suppressed by the very feculent body part which normally symbolizes the highest disdain and disregard – ironically also in the metaphorical phraseology which is imputed to the devil himself. By this close contact, moreover, not even the slightest intellectual input is necessary to suppress these demonical figures.

The ecclesiastical claim to superiority may also entail the “proximity of representations” which intend to allegorize the *dependency* of demonical effectiveness. Such cases are made visual by demons which are part of ecclesiastical interior decorations and, as a consequence of the passivity enforced by the sacred surroundings, display enraged or obscene or minatory physiognomies or gestures.<sup>57</sup> Didactic pictures also capitalize on failures of the devil as they show him become furious over compromising situations. This can, for instance, be found in the Vita of Saint Wolfgang (924?-994), bishop of Regensburg, who ordered the devil to build a church (fig. 9).<sup>58</sup> Such subordinate perceptions of the devil point out the transition from his theological interpretation as an inferior party to his didactic exposure as a powerless entity or as tricked fraudster who must finally concede the predominance of the good principle.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> For an extensive bibliography, see Sarah Wells, “A Database of Animals in Medieval Misericords,” in *Animal Diversities*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Alice Choyke (Krems: Medium Aevum Quotidianum, 2005): 123-35.

<sup>57</sup> See the fine stone carvings upon the line of stalls in York Minster Chapter House (1270/1280) showing natural, semi-natural, and unnatural faces, discussed by Hannah R. Johnson, “Monstrous Beauties and Lovely Deformities: The Marginal Sculptures of the York Minster Chapter House,” *York Historian* 15 (1998): 2-15. Another apposite example is the presbytery of a rural parish church in Austria (St. Marein bei Knittelfeld, Styria), where the vault is painted with a number of grotesque, dull, wrathful, and shaggy faces and grimaces which apparently symbolize the “controlled proximity” of the devil; for illustrations, see Elga Lanc, *Die mittelalterlichen Wandmalereien in der Steiermark*, vol. 2: *Illustrationen* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002), fig. 773-9.

<sup>58</sup> Saint Wolfgang Flinging the Axe, panel painting from an altarpiece, 1515/1520. St. Wolfgang bei Grades (Carinthia), subsidiary church. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems (Austria).

<sup>59</sup> Mahal, “Der Teufel,” 514-8; see the above-quoted competences of Saint Michael.



Fig. 9: Demonical emotions due to the inefficacy of proximity

The vita of Saint Margaret offers a visualization of the devil in “controlled proximity.” After she had defeated the devil solely with the aid of the cross it seems consistent that a medieval picture renders her traditional attribute as a totally peaceable dragon which almost fulfills the role of a cute lap dog (fig. 10).<sup>60</sup> At first glance one may smile about the comic aspect of such a representation. For medieval Christian viewers, however, it must have been amazing to see the formidable power of a terrific dragon/devil rendered absolutely harmless although physically as close as possible. Concerning the supreme ideal of Christian religious didactics (that is, to disarm the

<sup>60</sup> Saint Margaret, panel painting from an altarpiece, master of St. Leonhard, 1460/1465. Salzburg, Museum Carolino Augusteum. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems (Austria).

omnipresent devil and to assist Saint Augustine's *civitas Dei*) I would rate such an untroubled approach as most appreciated outcome in any possible case of the devil's proximity – at least in theory.



Fig. 10: A Christian mindset controlling the devil – a superhuman demand

Christian hagiography seems to take up or even cumulate examples of “controlled proximity” to recommend adequate mindsets. But it is important to notice the causality involved. “Controlled proximity” of the devil is not an input but an outcome:

The *practical* competence to control the devil's proximity naturally requires a personality who has passed through a real course of respective experiences. For instance, Saint George did not defeat the dragon *because* he was Saint George – he became *Saint* George because he defeated the dragon. In total, the didactic message of “controlled proximity” is that, confronted with a genuine Christian mental *habitus*, the devil's proximity turns out to be totally harmless and innocuous.

#### “CALCULATING PROXIMITY”

The protagonists of my short final category are all the didactic figures who were said to request the devil's help for a certain secular aim and who for this purpose make a bargain or form an alliance with the devil. The best known and most characteristic examples are subsumed under the terms witchcraft and sorcery. Both applications underlie an intentional and deliberate instrumentalization of the devil's extensive power which entails the devil's substantial proximity. Thus, the kind of proximity involved here should not be mistaken for “unnoticed proximity.” The visual representation of “calculating proximity” may result in two possible didactic ends:

- Didactic narrative and pictorial evidence usually demonstrate that the devil's business partners are finally deprived of their liberty as the devil implacably drags them to hell, which normally happens under very close and fatal corporeal proximity – unless a Christian authority intercedes (fig. 11).<sup>61</sup> The prevalent didactic message to the viewers is that any attempt at “calculating proximity” will end in “undesirable proximity” of the devil.
- The second possible end looks much more humane and philanthropic: the unintelligent, ridiculous, or pitiful devil who may be fobbed off and derided and who is reminiscent of devils in “controlled proximity.” This type, however, which is visualized particularly in liturgical drama, is hardly representative for the Middle Ages.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Devils Convey Hermogene in Bonds to Saint James, panel painting from an altarpiece, Tyrol, 1450/1460. Innsbruck, Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems (Austria).

<sup>62</sup> For more details, see Dinzelbacher, “Die Realität des Teufels im Mittelalter,” 163-4; Mahal, “Der Teufel,” 514-8; August Wünsche, *Der Sagenkreis vom geprellten Teufel* (Leipzig and Vienna: Akademie-Verlag, 1905).



Fig. 11: “Calculating proximity” implies a pernicious outcome

I hope that my catalogue of “devils in visual proximity” will be helpful in reading medieval evidence according to possible historical meanings. The lynchpin (and the key to any broader questions about medieval culture) is the religious didactic axiom behind both “representations of proximity” and “proximity of representations.” The spatial categories of distance vs. proximity symbolize the mental categories of good vs.

evil to safeguard the spiritual category of salvation, in explicit contrast to damnation (fig. 12).<sup>63</sup>



Fig. 12: Proximity to the devil vs. proximity to the Lord

As the three- or fourfold exegesis of the Bible likewise suggests, austere *moral* standards would thereby be imposed on any individual (*tropologia*).<sup>64</sup> Because salvation can be accomplished *only* during *real* life, medieval ecclesiastical authorities utilized devils in visual proximity as harsh reminders of the contradictory day-to-day risk potential involved. The catalogue of vices substantiates the ubiquitous proximity of the risks to which the devil is symbolically assigned as a negatively connoted symbolic entity. Representations of devils in visual proximity, thus, recommended that medieval Christian

<sup>63</sup> Last Judgement (detail), panel painting, 1490/1500. Heidenreichstein (Lower Austria), castle. Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Krems (Austria).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Henri de Lubac, "Ein altes Distichon. Die Lehre vom 'vierfachen Schriftsinn' (1948)," in idem, *Typologie, Allegorie, geistiger Sinn. Studien zur Geschichte der christlichen Schriftauslegung* (Freiburg: Johannes-Verlag, 1999), 319-41.



viewers develop a definite mental *habitus* – the *habitus* of self-reflection and self-control which would be continuously aware of that ubiquitous proximity.<sup>65</sup> Targeting this *habitus* means a gigantic task, which shows that the term “supernatural” can be given the connotation of “superhuman” (in the sense of something which exceeds normal human puissance and energy). All these interrelations reveal the basic anthropological relevance of the topic, and in this respect the devil’s omnipresence in medieval culture turns out to be normal and not at all “supernatural” (now in the sense of something inexplicable or miraculous). Relating the devil so closely to practical life is a noteworthy parallel to present-day psychology,<sup>66</sup> even though here the devil is divested of all his former religious dimensions. This substantial difference, however, necessitates highlighting the religious constituents which the supernatural had in the Middle Ages.

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<sup>65</sup> That *habitus* is explored by Ulrike Graßnick, *Ratgeber des Königs. Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherideal im spätmittelalterlichen England* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Heiko Ernst, *Wie uns der Teufel reitet. Von der Aktualität der 7 Todsünden* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2006).



## SUPERNATURAL FIGURES INCOGNITO

*Béla Zsolt Szakács*

The identification of supernatural beings is not always easy. In the visual arts, angels and devils are regularly marked with conventional signs such as horns or wings, which facilitate their recognition. However, in certain cases the real identity of a supernatural figure is hidden. This is frequently connected to legends in which an important element of the narration is the fact that the participant is not able to recognise whom he or she is meeting. In the Christian literature this goes back to the Gospels. After the resurrection of Christ, his personality was usually not identified without difficulty. The first who met the resurrected Saviour was Mary Magdalene; according to the Gospel of John (20:14-17), the penitent woman realised that the tomb of Jesus was empty and

<sup>14</sup> ... she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest you?" She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus saith unto her, "Mary." She turned herself, and saith unto him, "Rabboni!" which is to say, Master.

<sup>17</sup> Jesus saith unto her, "Touch me not."

Thus, the identification of Jesus was certainly not easy. Mary Magdalene needed a few seconds to understand the real situation. The disciples at Emmaus needed more. They were conversing with the Master during a long journey, "but their eyes were holden that they should not know him," as Luke states (Luke 24:16). It was not until Jesus broke the bread that "their eyes were opened and they knew him." (Luke 24:31) In this case in which form Jesus appeared to his companions is not explained; the identification was certainly hindered by the fact that Jesus was thought to be dead.

Sometimes identification is impossible because of the ignorance of the person to whom the supernatural figure appeared. Such a well-known story from the legend of Saint Sylvester is depicted in the Cappella San Silvestro, a chapel in the church of SS.

Quattro Coronati in Rome;<sup>1</sup> the frescos are dated to 1246. In the first scene Constantine the Great is lying in his bed, sick since he fell victim to the incurable disease of leprosy. One night in a dream two honourable persons appeared and promised him a remedy. The next day the emperor invited Pope Sylvester and (quoting the *Legenda Aurea*) “asked who the two gods were who had appeared to him, and Sylvester answered that they were not gods but apostles of Christ. Then, at the emperor’s request, the bishop sent for images of the apostles, and Constantine, examining them, exclaimed that they looked like the two who had appeared to him.”<sup>2</sup>

Conversion is often the result of the correct identification of a supernatural being not known before. Saint Catherine of Alexandria recognised her true bridegroom in the image presented to her by a hermit. An example of this legend is represented in a panel painting from Bát (today Bátovce, Slovakia), painted in the mid-fifteenth century and kept in the Christian Museum in Esztergom.<sup>3</sup> In these cases an expert was needed to identify the supernatural figure: the pope, a hermit, and regularly, a cleric.

Sometimes the unidentified supernatural figure introduces himself at the end of the meeting, as happened with German pilgrims during a journey to Rome. Near to Pavia, a bishop “greeted the men, and asked where they were going. When they told him, he said: ‘Go to Pavia and ask your way to the monastery of Saint Peter, called Golden Heaven, and there you will obtain the mercy you desire.’ The pilgrims asked him his name, and he answered: ‘Saint Augustine, once bishop of the city of Hippo,’ and vanished from their sight. They went into Pavia and, arriving at the monastery, learned that Augustine’s body rested there ... When the infirm came to the tomb, all were restored to health, as if there had never been any defect in their bodies.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, Saint Augustine had simply diverted the pilgrims from their intention to visit Rome and advertised his own cult space. The Hungarian Angevin Legendary,<sup>5</sup> out of which I

<sup>1</sup> Otto Demus, *Romanische Wandmalerei* (München: Hirmer, 1992), 126-7.

<sup>2</sup> Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (Florence: SISMEL – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1998) 111 (hereafter: Maggioni, *Legenda*); Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), vol. 1, 64-5 (hereafter: Ryan, *Legend*).

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Museum Esztergom*, ed. Pál Cséfalvay (Budapest: Corvina, 1993), 175-6 (Gyöngyi Török); *Gotika*, ed. Dušan Buran (Bratislava: Slovenská Národná Galéria, 2003), 266, 699-700 (Milena Bartlová).

<sup>4</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 865-6; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 2, 131.

<sup>5</sup> The Hungarian Angevin Legendary is a richly illustrated fourteenth-century Bolognese manuscript commissioned by the Hungarian court in the 1330s: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 8541; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 360, 1-26; Saint Petersburg, Ermitage, 16930-16934; Berkeley, Bancroft Library of University of California, f. 2MS2A2M2 1300-37; New York, Metropolitan Museum, 1994.516; Paris, Louvre, RF 29940. Facsimile editions: *Magyar Anjou Legendárium*, ed. Ferenc Levárdy (Budapest: Magyar Helikon-Corvina, 1973), and *Heiligenleben. “Ungarisches Legendarium,” Codex Vat.lat. 8541*, ed. Giovanni Morello, Heide Stamm and Gerd Betz (Stuttgart: Belser, 1990). The most recent monography: Béla Zsolt Szakács, *A Magyar Anjou Legendárium képi rendszerei* (The pictorial world of the Hungarian Angevin Legendary) (Budapest: Balassi, 2006); an English translation is in preparation.

selected most of my examples, depicts the scene with a real representation of the bishop; his supernatural character is not indicated.<sup>6</sup>

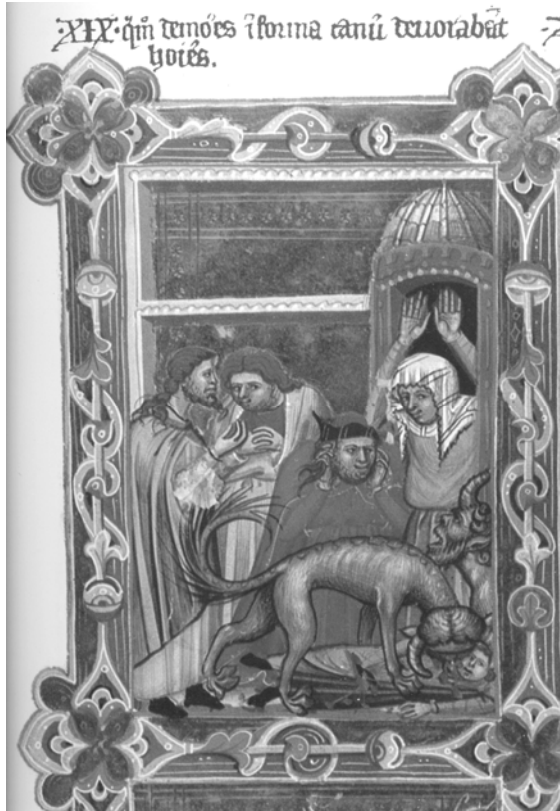


Fig. 1: Saint Andrew and the devil in the form of dogs.

The Hungarian Angevin Legendary, Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 18v. From: Levárdy, *Legendarium*

In these cases the positive supernatural figures, although not identified at first sight, did not intentionally hide their identities. Unidentified supernatural beings can play negative roles, too. In the legend of the apostle Saint Andrew one can read: "... when Andrew arrived at the gate of another town, he came upon the body of a young man being carried out for burial. Asking what had happened to the youth, he was told that seven dogs had come and killed him in his bed. The apostle, in tears, cried out: 'I know, Lord, that these were the seven demons I chased out of Nicaea!' "<sup>7</sup> In the

<sup>6</sup> Ermitage 16931; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 120.

<sup>7</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 28; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 15.

Hungarian Angevin Legendary the demons are easily recognisable by their devil-like heads, but the mourning parents of the dead boy did not realise that the dogs were demons (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup> For such an identification a saint was needed, who immediately resuscitated the innocent victim.

Saint Anthony Abbot is the saint who had the most famous and most frequently represented adventures with devils. The most classical episode took place in a tomb, where

a crowd of demons tore at him ... There, lying prostrated by the pain of his wounds, in the strength of his spirit he challenged the demons to renew the combat. They appeared in the forms of various wild beasts and tore his flesh cruelly with their teeth, horns and claws.<sup>9</sup>

The demons are represented in the Angevin Legendary with horns and long teeth, as the description requires, but instead of wild beasts they are devils, with human-type heads, and wield with cudgels instead of using claws;<sup>10</sup> therefore, the image makes their real nature easier to understand. The event ended with another supernatural appearance: "Then of a sudden a wonderful light shone in the place and drove all the demons away, and Anthony's hurts were cured." Anthony immediately realised that Christ was there; in the picture, however, the latter's figure is represented instead of light to make the whole scene more understandable.

Devils also typically prefer to take the form of a human corpse. The Angevin Legendary depicts a story in the image cycle of the Hungarian king Saint Ladislav which is not known in the written version.<sup>11</sup> One night the king was praying in a church where the cadaver of a deceased man was lying on a catafalque. The dead person became animated and suddenly threw a piece of drapery at the king. What is more, he tried to beat the saint with the catafalque. Ladislav took the cross from the altar and with its help expelled the devil. In the last image the devil is represented in its own form. The cadaver, lying on the ground, is no less horrifying, but differs significantly from the other scenes where it had typical long, devil-type ears. The devil took the form of a corpse in order to be even more frightening than in its own figure. The saint recognised the situation, however, and the power of the cross was enough to overcome the enemy.

<sup>8</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fols. 17r-18v; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plates 37-8.

<sup>9</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 155-6; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Ermitage 16934. Lajos Vayer and Ferenc Levárdy, "Nuovi contributi agli studi circa il Leggendaro Angioviniano ungherese," *Acta Historiae Artium XVIII* (1972): 71-83, fig. 3; in full colour Szakács, *A Magyar Anjou Legendarium*, plate 25.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Béla Zsolt Szakács, "Between Chronicle and Legend: Image Cycles of St Ladislav in Fourteenth-Century Hungarian Manuscripts," in *The Medieval Chronicle IV*, ed. Erik Kooper (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 149-75.

The miniature makes the situation understandable by giving the cadaver some diabolic features (fig. 2).<sup>12</sup>

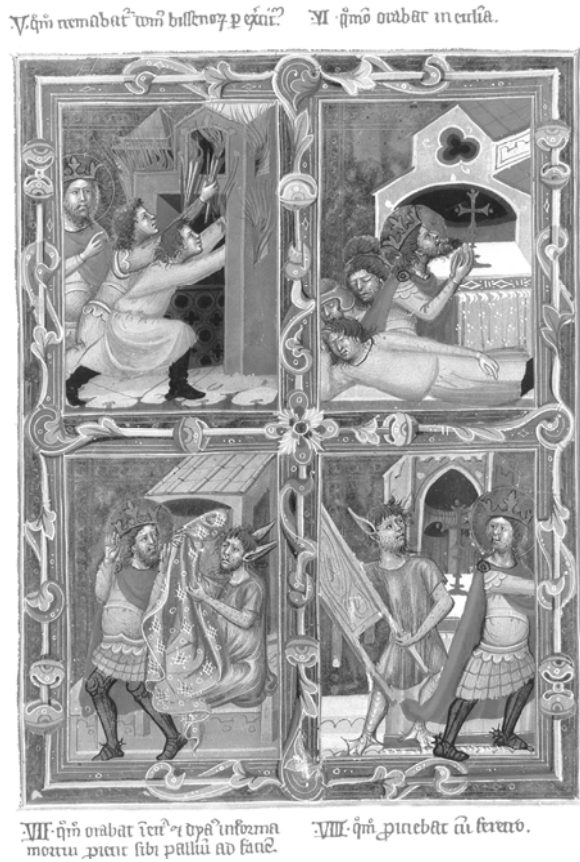


Fig. 2: Saint Ladislas fighting with the devil appearing in the form of a corpse.

The Hungarian Angevin Legendary, Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 81v. From: Levárdy, *Legendarium*

In other cases the devil took a form which was less evident. We can read in the legend of Saint Benedict of Nursia, that “one day a small black bird came to annoy Benedict, fluttering so close to his face that the saint could have caught it with his hand, but instead he made the sign of the cross and the bird flew away.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fols. 81v-82r; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plates 134-5.

<sup>13</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 310; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 187.

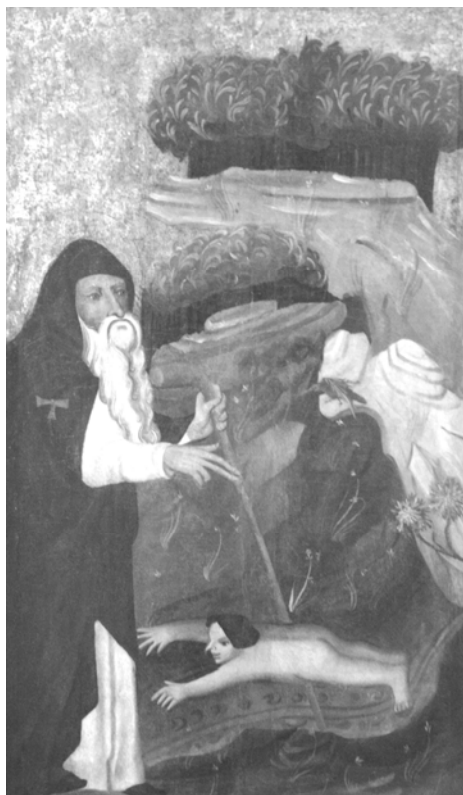


Fig. 3: Saint Anthony Abbot and the devil in the form of a child.  
 Panel painting from Szepesdaróc/Dravce, 1450-60, Budapest, Hungarian National Gallery  
 (photo: Béla Zs. Szakács)

Saint Anthony Abbot, the great expert on demonology, had an interesting experience with a demon of impurity. In a rarely represented scene, in a mid-fifteenth-century panel painting in the Hungarian National Gallery,<sup>14</sup> a child is lying in front of him (fig. 3). His legend mentions that “once when he had overcome the spirit of fornication by the virtue of faith, the devil appeared to him in the form of a black child, prostrated himself, and admitted that he was conquered.” Although the child is represented as white instead of black, there is no sign in the picture that he is the devil. The legend continues with a surprising explanation: “Anthony had prayed to God to let him see this demon of impurity that plagued young people; and, seeing the demon in the form just described, he said: ‘Now that I have seen you in all your ugliness, I will fear

<sup>14</sup> *The Hungarian National Gallery. The Old Collections*, ed. Miklós Mojzer (Budapest: Corvina, 1984), plate 29.



you no longer.’”<sup>15</sup> Thus, although it seems as though the devil took the form of a child in order to mislead the viewer, it turns out that this is his own form, that is, “all its ugliness.”

Saints had the power to identify the devil when he appeared in all kinds of forms; ordinary human beings were not always so successful. One of the most effective forms the devil takes in order to cheat is the body of a beautiful woman. This happened with a certain

truly devout bishop who venerated Saint Andrew above all other saints. ... This aroused the devil’s envy, and he turned all his cunning to the task of deceiving the bishop. So he took the form of a marvellously beautiful woman, who came to the bishop’s palace ... The bishop, the woman, and the rest of the company went to the table, the woman seated facing the prelate and the others to either side. The bishop could not take his eyes from her face nor contain his admiration for her beauty; and, the eye being fixed, the inner man was wounded. The ancient enemy, aware of this, drove his dart deep into the bishop’s heart, at the same time making the alluring face more and more beautiful. The bishop was on the verge of consenting to the thought of proposing a wicked act to the woman at the first opportunity, when suddenly a pilgrim came pounding on the door and loudly demanded admittance.<sup>16</sup>

The woman suggested asking

the pilgrim how far it is from earth to heaven. ... If he has the answer, he is indeed worthy to seat at the bishop’s table. ... The pilgrim’s reply to the messenger was: “Go back to the one who sent you to me and put that question carefully to him. He knows the answer better than I do and can answer it better, because he traversed the distance when he fell from heaven into the abyss. I never fell from heaven and so never measured the distance. He is not a woman but the devil, who took on a woman’s likeness.” The messenger, frightened by what he had heard, hurried to report it to those inside. They sat stunned and bewildered by the message, but the ancient enemy vanished from their midst. The bishop, coming to himself, bitterly reproached himself and with tears prayed for pardon for his fault ... That very night it was revealed to the bishop that it was Saint Andrew himself who, to save him, had come dressed as a pilgrim.<sup>17</sup>

In this amazing story the supernatural figures on both sides, good and bad, are fighting incognito for the soul of the bishop. Saint Andrew, in order to protect his devotee, took up the same weapons as the devil and revealed the real identity of the ancient enemy. In

<sup>15</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 155; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 33-4; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 18-9.

<sup>17</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 35-6; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 20.

the depiction of this scene, the saint, dressed as a pilgrim, can be identified by his characteristic physiognomy as well as his halo. The woman, on the other hand, is not represented with devil-like features as usual, but the devil escapes from her mouth (fig. 4).<sup>18</sup> This follows the iconography of exorcism as it is represented in the legends of Saint Paul and Saint Donatus.<sup>19</sup>



Vltia qm apuit le epo infoma pgr

Fig. 4: The devil escapes from the woman's mouth.

Panel painting from Szepesdaróc/Dravce, 1450-60, Budapest, Hungarian National Gallery  
(photo: Béla Zs. Szakács)

This kind of cheating by the devil is so common that in certain cases it led to misinterpretation of the legend, as can be seen in an episode connected to Saint Benedict. He had an enemy in a certain priest called Florentius:

Florentius, seeing that he could not kill the body of the master, burned with the desire to bring death to the souls of his disciples. To this end he ranged seven young women in the monastery garden to dance and sing in order to

<sup>18</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 20v; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 40.

<sup>19</sup> Eremitage 16933; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 30; Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 62r; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 105.

arouse the monks' passions. The holy man watched this from his cell and feared that his disciples might fall into sin, so he surrendered to his adversary's hostility and set out to find another place to live, taking several monks with him.<sup>20</sup>

The Latin inscription attached to the depiction of this story in the Hungarian Angevin Legendary identifies the girls with demons.<sup>21</sup> This is unfounded, since they were sent by an earthly enemy of Benedict, but their mission was certainly diabolic.

The most dangerous trickery of the devil is, however, if he takes the form of a positive supernatural figure. The legend of Saint James the Great commemorates two such stories :

Hugh of Saint Victor tells the story of a pilgrim on the way to Saint James, to whom the devil appeared in the guise of the saint, and, bemoaning the misery of this present life, said he would be happy if the pilgrim was willing to kill himself in his honour. The pilgrim grasped a sword and killed himself forthwith ... However, the man who had died came back to life and declared that while the devil who had persuaded him to kill himself was leading him to the torments of hell, Saint James met them, snatched the man away, brought him before the heavenly judge, and, despite the demon's accusations, obtained his restoration to life.<sup>22</sup>

In the related image (fig. 5), the devil is depicted similarly to Saint James (even with a halo); however, the horns and long ears identify him for the viewer. The real Saint James is represented in the next picture, where the devil can be seen in his true form, too.<sup>23</sup>

Another similar story is told about a young man from Lyon, who killed himself on the advice of the devil, who appeared to him in the form of Saint James.<sup>24</sup> In the related miniatures the cheating is not represented, only the result, with the devils and the real James together with the Virgin Mary, who resuscitated the poor man.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 313; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 188.

<sup>21</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 86r: *quomodo demones corizabant ante ipsum in uno uiridario in forma puellarum*, Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 139.

<sup>22</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 657; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 2, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 34v; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 58, pictures 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 658; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 2, 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 34v; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 58, pictures 3-4.

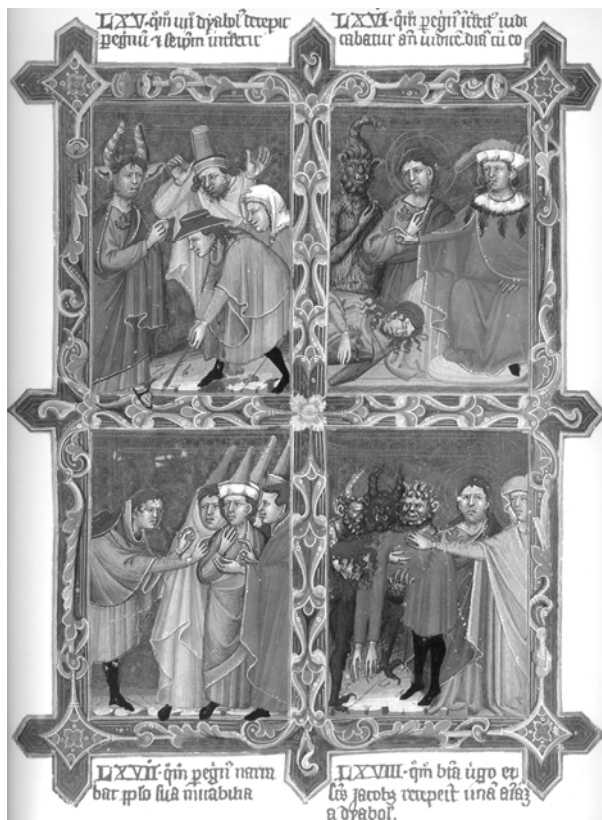


Fig. 5: The story of the pilgrim cheated by the devil in the form of Saint James the Great.  
 The Hungarian Angevin Legendary, Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 34v.  
 From: Levárdy, *Legendarium*

In the case of the devil, the hidden form is an essential element of the success of its malicious actions. The number of victims of the devil would be much lower if he would always appear and act in his natural form. However, positive supernatural figures sometimes also use disguised forms. Jesus Christ often appears incognito, thus testing believers. Saint Christopher is famous for his story of carrying the child Jesus across the river:

... the child became as heavy as lead: the farther he went, the higher rose the waves, and the weight of the child pressed down upon his shoulders so crushingly that he was in dire distress. He feared that he was about to founder, but at last he reached the other bank. Setting the child down he said to him: 'My boy, you put me in great danger, and you weighed so much that if I had

had the whole world on my back I could not have felt a heavier burden!' The child answered him: 'Don't be surprised, Christopher! You were not only carrying the whole world, you had him who created the world upon your shoulders! I am Christ your king, to whom you render service by doing the work you do here...' With that the child vanished.<sup>26</sup>

In this scene, which has been depicted innumerable times, the painter of the Angevin Legendary did not mark the child with specific attributes (for instance, a halo with cross); however, the form of the child is quite characteristic and the story was well-known all over Europe.<sup>27</sup>

Another famous legend is connected to Saint Martin. When he met a naked beggar at the gates of Amiens, he was certainly not aware of to whom he donated half of his coat. However, the next night he had a dream which revealed the identity of the beggar as Christ.<sup>28</sup> In this often-represented legend the real identity of the beggar is rarely made visual (the Angevin Legendary does not do it, either<sup>29</sup>). Perhaps this was well-known, or it would have obscured the general significance of Saint Martin's charity.

Comparable events can be found more often in the legends of mendicant saints. Bartholomaeus de Pisa describes such a case in his legend of Saint Louis of Toulouse:

When all the lepers came together to his hospice, there was one, who was particularly big and very horrible in his illness, at the sight of whom King Robert and Raymond, his brother, got completely frightened. The man of God, Louis, washed him more attentively and devotionally than the others and served him at the table by ministering all the necessary tasks more diligently. However, when the next day, on Good Friday, in the memory of the Passion of Christ, who appeared as a leper on the cross, Saint Louis wanted to have the afore-mentioned leper in his hospice, despite the most diligent search, he was not found in the whole city. And when he asked the other lepers, they replied that there had not been such a person among them, and they had not seen anyone like him. Therefore, it is to be believed piously that this person was Our Lord Jesus Christ, or one of His angels, who in the likeness of this horrible leper revealed himself to the holy man to strengthen his virtue and humbleness.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 666; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 2, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 360,23; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 97.

<sup>28</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 1134-5; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 2, 292.

<sup>29</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 77v; Levárdy, *Legendarium*, plate 122.

<sup>30</sup> Bartholomaeus de Pisa, "De sancto Ludovico episcopo Tholosano," *Analecta Franciscana* IV (1906): 312. English translation by Judit Majorossy and Zsolt Hunyadi.

In the miniature of the Hungarian Angevin Legendary, the leper kissed by Saint Louis is marked with a halo and cross, therefore he is clearly recognisable. The legs of Christ in the air refer to the disappearance of the leper (fig. 6).<sup>31</sup>



Fig. 6: Jesus appearing to Saint Louis of Toulouse in the form of a leper.  
The Hungarian Angevin Legendary, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, f2MSA2M21300.  
From: Szakács, *A Magyar Anjou Legendárium*

This motif in the legend of Louis of Toulouse can be connected to another one from the life of the founder of his order. Saint Francis, who, as the *Legenda Aurea* says, “found himself face to face with a leper, the sort of man he utterly abhorred; but, remembering the Lord’s word to him, he ran and kissed the afflicted man. The leper

<sup>31</sup> Julia Bader and George Starr, “A Saint in the Family: a Leaf of the ‘Hungarian Anjou Legendary’ at Berkeley,” *Hungarian Studies* 1 (1986): 3-11; Szakács, *A Magyar Anjou Legendárium*, plate 30.

instantly vanished.”<sup>32</sup> The story is described similarly by other sources like the legends of Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure.<sup>33</sup> None of them tells explicitly that the leper was Christ, however, it is suggested by the motif of his sudden disappearance.<sup>34</sup>

Martin, Francis, and Louis of Toulouse, together with many others, stood the test successfully. Francis in showing his love towards lepers imitated Christ, as did Louis. The idea that acts of charity are all related to Christ, however, goes back to the teaching of Jesus himself. Describing the Last Judgement, he enumerates the acts of mercy and reveals that “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40). All the stories in which the subject of charity turns to be Christ are a verbatim (maybe too verbatim) application of this sentence.

Saints can also appear incognito, although their motivations are usually different. One of the miracles connected to Saint James the Great commemorates an unfortunate pilgrim who lost his wife, money, and horse on the way:

Grieving for his lost wife he continued his journey, carrying some of his children on his shoulders and leading the others by the hand. A man came along leading an ass, was moved to compassion by the pilgrim’s plight, and lent him the beast to carry the children. When he came to the shrine of Saint James and was watching and praying beside the apostle’s tomb, the saint appeared to him and asked whether he recognised him. The man said no, and the saint said: ‘I am the apostle James, who lent you my beast on your way here, and now I lend it to you for the return journey; but you should know in advance that that innkeeper will fall off the roof and die, and all he stole from you will be returned to you!’ Everything happened as the saint had foretold. The man got home safe and happy, and when he lifted his children from the ass’s back, the animal vanished.<sup>35</sup>

In the miniatures the man who lent the ass is represented as identical to Saint James as he appears elsewhere, and there is no visual difference between his first and second appearance to the pilgrim.<sup>36</sup>

Other saints may do a benefaction to their devotees incognito, as well. I quote from the legend of Mary Magdalene:

<sup>32</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 1017; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 2, 221.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas a Celano, *Vita secunda sancti Francisci*, caput 5 (2C 9), in English translation: *Francis of Assisi: early documents*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), vol. 2, 248; Bonaventura, “*Legenda Sancti Francisci*,” caput 1:5, in *S. Bonaventurae Opera omnia*, to-mus VIII (Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi): Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1898), 507, in English translation: Armstrong et al., *Francis of Assisi*, vol. 2, 533–4.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Paris, Louvre RF 29940; Gyöngyi Török, “Problems of the Hungarian Angevin Legendary. A New Folio in the Louvre,” *Arte Cristiana* 89 (2001): 417–26. Szakács, *A Magyar Anjou Legendárium*, plate 26.

<sup>35</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 659; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 2, 8–9.

<sup>36</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fols. 35r–36v; Levárdy, *Legendárium*, plates 59–60.

A clerk from Flanders, Stephen by name, had fallen into such a welter of sinfulness that, having committed every sort of evil, he could do no works of salvation nor even bear to hear of them. Yet he had deep devotion to blessed Mary Magdalene, observed her vigils by fasting, and celebrated her feast day. Once when he was on a visit to her tomb and was half asleep and half awake, Mary Magdalene appeared to him as a lovely, sad-eyed woman supported by two angels, one on either side, and she said to him: 'Stephen, I ask you, why do you repay me with deeds unworthy of my deserts? Why are you not moved with compunction by what my own lips insistently say? From the time when you began to be devoted to me I have always prayed the Lord urgently for you. Get up, then! Repent! I will never leave you until you are reconciled with God!' The clerk soon felt so great an inpouring of grace in himself that he renounced the world, entered the religious life, and lived a very holy life thereafter.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, in the miniature the saint is represented as usual, without stressing the beauty of the woman.<sup>38</sup> In this case the text identifies her with the saint explicitly. In another story this is only suggested:

A man who lay in chains for having committed the crime of extortion called upon Mary Magdalene to come to his aid, and one night a beautiful woman appeared to him, broke his fetters, and ordered him to be off. Seeing himself unshackled, he got away as fast as possible.<sup>39</sup>

Although not mentioned explicitly in the text, the "beautiful woman" of the miniature is definitely identical with Mary Magdalene (fig. 7).<sup>40</sup> Saints, thus, appear in the form of ordinary people for their devotees, not to test them as Jesus did, but to help them in a discreet way.

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<sup>37</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 641-2; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 383.

<sup>38</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 104r; Levárdy, *Legendárium*, plate 169, picture 4.

<sup>39</sup> Maggioni, *Legenda*, 641; Ryan, *Legend*, vol. 1, 383.

<sup>40</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 104r; Levárdy, *Legendárium*, plate 169, picture 3.



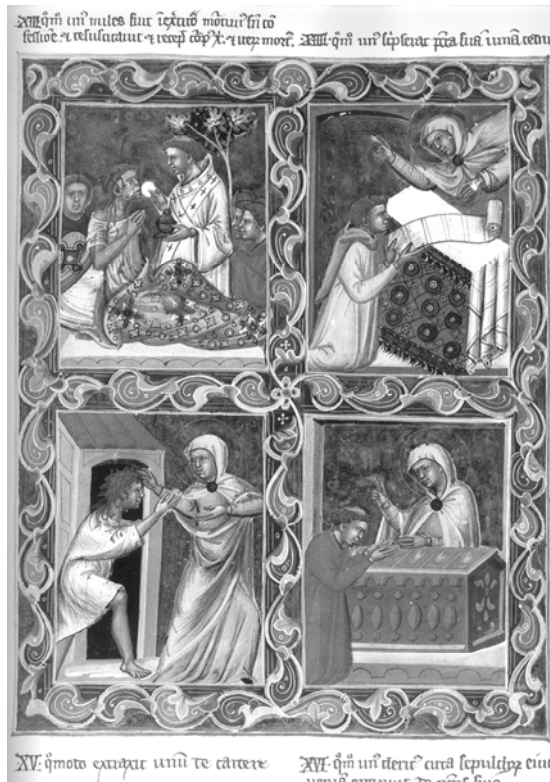


Fig. 7: The appearance of Saint Mary Magdalene in the form of beautiful women.

The Hungarian Angevin Legendary, Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 104r.

From: Levárdy, *Legendarium*

At this point a problem must be noted which has often been discussed but, in my opinion, without satisfactory results. The most famous story connected to Ladislás (László) is his fight with the Cuman. The historical background is a Cuman (or Petcheneg) attack against Hungary, which ended at the battle of Kerlés with a Hungarian victory. At the end of the battle (as is described in the Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle), a Cuman tried to escape with a beautiful Hungarian girl, but Ladislás saved her.<sup>41</sup> The Angevin Legendary describes the story in six images. In the first scene, Ladislás is pursuing a Cuman; in the second, they are fighting with each other. In the

<sup>41</sup> "Chronici Hungarici composito saeculi XIV," ed. Alexander Domanovszky, in *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum tempore ducum regumque stirpis Arpadianae gestarum*, vol. 1, ed. Emericus Szentpétery (Budapest: Academia Litter. Hungarica, 1937), 366-9. Cf. Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 190-4.; Szakács, *Between Chronicle and Legend*, 151-2.

third scene, the girl helps Ladislás by striking the Cuman's feet with a battle-axe, and finally she cuts off the pagan soldier's head. The story ends in scenes of the king at rest and the miraculous healing of the king by the Virgin Mary (fig. 8).<sup>42</sup>

This last scene is unique in the iconography of the legend of Ladislás. On the basis of the similarities between the faces of the rescued girl and the Holy Virgin, Hungarian scholars (Pál Lukcsics in 1930, Ferenc Levárdy in 1973, and Gyula László in 1993) saw the two persons as the same.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately no written sources help in understanding the situation, since the Virgin Mary is never mentioned in the different versions of the story. Ernő Marosi connected the last scene to a short reference in the Chronicle (*divina miseratione ... sanatus*, he was cured by divine mercy) which seems to be convincing.<sup>44</sup> Although the knightly attitude of the entire story would harmonise nicely with the idea that the girl saved by the king was the Holy Virgin, I have to reject this interpretation. The similarity of the women is a stylistic feature: the miniaturist used the same pattern in the entire manuscript. On the other hand, as noted above, the supernatural figures represented are regularly identifiable with attributes even if they appear incognito according to the texts. In rare cases, as in the legend of Christopher and Martin, Jesus was not marked, probably because the meaning was self-evident or the identification was not stressed. There is not a single case in the whole codex, however, which depicts the same supernatural figure in different forms: hidden and unveiled.

This is certainly the result of the techniques of the visual narration. In the written versions of these legends the unidentified supernatural being was described either from the point of view of the persons taking part in the story or from the viewpoint of the omniscient narrator. In the first case, the reader is informed of the real identity of the supernatural figure only at a later point in the narration. This is, however, not possible in the visual narrative. The identity of the actors should be clear in all scenes, since a change in the physiognomy would lead to confusion. Thus, the representation of a supernatural figure incognito is especially difficult: he or she should be identifiable and at the same time his or her veiled character should be indicated. The miniatures in the Hungarian Angevin Legendary either show no real difference or indicate the real identity with clear attributes.

<sup>42</sup> Vat. lat. 8541, fols. 82r-83v; Levárdy, *Legendárium*, plates 135-6.

<sup>43</sup> Pál Lukcsics, *Szent László király ismeretlen legendája* (The unknown legend of King Ladislás the Saint) (Budapest: Stephaneum, 1930), 18; Levárdy, *Legendárium*, explanation to plate 136; Gyula László, *A Szent László-legenda középkori falképei* (The medieval murals of the legend of Saint Ladislás) (Budapest: Tájak-Korok-Múzeumok Egyesület, 1993), 48.

<sup>44</sup> *Postmodum divina miseratione a vulnere illo cito est sanatus; Chronici Hungarici* 368; Ernő Marosi, *Kép és hasonmás. Művészet és valóság a 14-15. századi Magyarországon* (Image and likeness. Art and reality in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in Hungary) (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1995), 201.



Fig. 8: The end of the story of Saint Ladislav and the Cuman, and the Virgin curing the saint.

The Hungarian Angevin Legendary, Vat. lat. 8541, fol. 83v.

From: Levárdy, *Legendarium*

Therefore I would like to join the conclusion of Rudolf Berliner, formulated some sixty years ago: a visual representation cannot be translated verbatim to textual forms because it would be misleading. What can be true in representations is often unacceptable in words.<sup>45</sup> The language of the pictorial arts requires different narrative techniques, which should be taken into consideration when interpreting natural and supernatural figures, both identified and incognito.

<sup>45</sup> Rudolf Berliner, "The Freedom of Medieval Art," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 28 (1945): 265.



GUARDIANS OR AVENGERS?  
DEPICTIONS OF ANGELS ON TRANSYLVANIAN ALTARPIECES  
FROM THE LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

*Maria Crăciun*

As is usual for a polyptych decorating a Marian altar, the altarpiece of Biertan (Birrhälm, Berethalom) has an extended Infancy cycle depicted on the interior of the wings.<sup>1</sup> The Flight into Egypt is part of this cycle. In this scene, Mary and the Christ Child have not yet alighted from the donkey, while Joseph is trying to pick the fruit of a palm tree. Angels, mostly clad in white, hover in the branches of the tree. This image raises questions about the relation between the image and its textual sources and the role of the angels in this composition. For an answer one may turn to the story recounted, not in the Bible but in an apocryphal text, “The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.”<sup>2</sup> While resting in the shade of a palm tree on their way to Egypt, Mary and Joseph were concerned about the lack of food and water. Although the tree was full of fruit, it was lodged in the upper branches, far out of reach. This was an opportunity for the Christ Child to demonstrate his ability to perform miracles by requesting the tree to help. The tree not only made its fruit available but also provided water. It is essentially this narrative that is depicted in visual terms on the panel from Biertan. There is, however, one significant difference; there are no angels in the textual narrative, although they do appear rather prominently in the visual representation (fig. 1).

The differences prompt a number of questions. What types of compositions do angels generally appear in? What can we make of the presence of the angels in the visual narrative? What are their functions? Are they meant to attest the miraculous nature of

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<sup>1</sup> Gisela and Otmar Richter, *Siebenbürgische Flügelaltäre* (Thaur bei Innsbruck: Wort und Welt Verlag, 1992), 68, date it to 1483 based on an inscription in the book one of the priests is holding in the “12 Year Old Jesus at the Temple” panel.

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelii apocryfe*, translated and introduced by Cristian Bădiliță, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bucharest: Polirom, 1999), 145. The episode also has scriptural foundation as mentioned in Matthew 2:13: “The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying: ‘Arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt.’”

the event, or are they to bear witness to the divine nature of the Child? What is their nature and its outward signs?



Fig. 1: Panel from Biertan, Flight to Egypt (photo: Maria Crăciun)

Starting from the premise that angels are “heavenly creatures,” supernatural beings,<sup>3</sup> one wonders how this special status was given visual expression and whether there is any connection between their specific functions and the images which convey

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Pleșu, *Despre îngeri* (About Angels) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003), 27-8, mentions that the angel is the superior of man, the one who shows him how he should be. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, “Migrations of Angels in the Early Modern World,” in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. iidem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3, define angels as intermediaries between God and humanity in anthropomorphic form. These celestial beings carry out God’s commands and reveal his will in a multiplicity of ways.

this particular status. Consequently, this paper will focus on determining the roles and functions of angels in religious narrative and the visual expression of their specific (supernatural) status.

It is particularly interesting to look at a well-defined body of images, altarpieces that were originally produced for the churches of the Saxon community in present-day Romania. Whether these artefacts were meant for the high altars in rural or city parish churches or for subsidiary altars in urban ones, the common culture which these communities shared and the peculiarities of their religious life and ecclesiastical organisation are a useful framework for understanding the iconographical choices.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE FUNCTIONS OF ANGELS

In Annunciation compositions, the Archangel Gabriel is one of the main characters next to the Virgin and clearly plays the role of herald, which is suggested by the Greek word *angelos* itself (as this means messenger).<sup>5</sup> Thus, before the angel is defined by his essence, he is defined by his function, and his function is to incessantly cover the distance between heaven and earth bringing important news and announcing miraculous events. The structure of the compositions is somewhat repetitive and the example of Mălâncrav (Malmkrog, Almakerék) is a suitable epitome. The Virgin is depicted kneeling in front of a prie dieu (fig. 2). The archangel kneels in front of the Virgin and interrupts her prayer with the amazing news. He holds a lily, the symbol of the Virgin's purity, and a scroll with the words mentioned in the Gospel, Luke 1:28 *Ave gratia plena dominus tecum* ("Hail thou who are highly favoured, the Lord is with thee"). The inscription itself serves a number of different functions. It has been suggested that the viewer is invited to associate the angelic salutation with the prayer that adopted it as its opening phrase, the *Ave Maria*. The prayer's popularity was due to its inclusion in the Little Office of the Virgin (The Hours of the Virgin). This was furthermore associated with devotional practices, such as the *Angelus*, the habit of reciting the *Ave Maria* three times at the sound of the evening bell, which was strongly promoted by the Franciscans. In 1327, Pope John XXII attached an indulgence to the practice, endorsing it further.

<sup>4</sup> András Kubinyi, "Plébános választások és egyházközségi önkormányzat a középkori Magyarországon" (Parish priest elections and parochial autonomy in late medieval Hungary), *Aetas* (1991-1992): 24-6; Thomas Nägler, *Die Ansiedlung der Siebenbürger Sachsen* (Bucharest: Kriterion Verlag, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Pleșu, *Despre îngerii*, 22, 260. The Greek word *angelos*, the Hebrew word *malakh*, the Arabic word *malak*, the Persian word *feresteh*, all mean messenger. Angels are mentioned in the Old Testament in Genesis 3:24, Genesis 22:9-12, Genesis 28:10-12, Chronicles 21:7-17, 1 Kings 19:5-8. The role of the angel as messenger is also mentioned in the Gospels, Matthew 1:20.

Consequently, to the faithful the inscription may have read as a familiar prayer to the Virgin and as a devotional cue for habitual users of the prayer book.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 2: Mălâncrav, Annunciation (photo: Maria Crăciun)

Sometimes, for example at Tătărlăua (Taterloch, Felsőtátarlaka), the Holy Spirit is present and the angel makes a gesture of benediction, which gives visual expression to the words “Blessed are thou amongst women” (Luke 1:28). This helps relate the image to the words spoken by Elizabeth at the time of the visitation “Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:42). This conflation of meaning has been used to suggest that the angelic salutation had simultaneous value for the believer as both an acclamation of Mary as the Mother of God and an invocation of her power to mediate for mankind. Thus, the Annunciation could be read as a devotional image, despite the fact that it had narrative subject matter, as an episode from the life of the Virgin. Within this framework, the angel’s pose may have been meant to act as a model of devotional practice for viewers. It has been suggested that text and image were intended to work together in prompting the viewer to adopt the role of Gabriel in the

<sup>6</sup> Anne van Dijk, “The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery,” *The Art Bulletin* 81 (1999): 420-36 (here 420-3).



Annunciation and address the Virgin with the words of the angelically inspired prayer.<sup>7</sup> This would lead one to conclude that the image had the power not only to encourage and aid devotion, but also to influence devotional practice. Thus, in this case, the angel, although obviously a herald, a divine messenger, the bearer of miraculous news, also has other, more complex functions, acting as a model for the devotional practices of the faithful.



Fig. 3: Mălâncrav, Nativity (photo: Maria Crăciun)

It is even more interesting to consider the role of angels in Nativity episodes. Sometimes, for example at Mălâncrav (fig. 3), the Nativity scene is conflated with the Annunciation to the Shepherds (Luke 2:8-15), where again the angel is explicitly mentioned (Luke 2:9-11). This conflation of episodes is in agreement with both scriptural narrative and liturgical practice as the Adoration of the Shepherds has no separate feast. Luke's narrative of the Annunciation to and the Adoration of the Shepherds follows immediately after his account of the birth of Jesus. The story of the shepherds is part of the Gospel readings for Christmas, the feast of the Nativity. Thus, the Adoration of the

<sup>7</sup> van Dijk, "Angelic Salutation," 423-9.

Shepherds was combined with and subsidiary to the Nativity of Christ in both liturgy and art. It has been suggested that, in late Gothic and Renaissance art, the Adoration of the Shepherds was usually incorporated with the Nativity.<sup>8</sup>

At both Mălâncrav and Biertan the Annunciation to the Shepherds is depicted in the background of the Nativity composition (see fig. 3 for the example from Mălâncrav and fig. 4 for the example from Biertan). The angel hovers in the sky and announces the birth of Christ. It is apparent that one is again dealing with a herald, a bearer of good tidings (Luke 2:10).

In the foreground of the composition at Mălâncrav (fig. 3), Mary and Joseph are depicted kneeling in prayer, adoring the Christ Child who is lying naked on the ground with his body emanating rays of light. This representation is very much in agreement with the vision of St. Bridget of Sweden who, in her *Revelations*, describes the miraculous birth of Christ. This is different from the account of the Nativity provided by Luke 2: 12: "And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger." This vision has been held to account for the development of a new type of Nativity in art. The erect Madonna adores the miraculously born infant "lying on the ground naked and shining." This image of the radiant, naked infant became popular throughout Europe,<sup>9</sup> so it should not be surprising to encounter it in Transylvania as well.

The interesting thing is that the child is also adored by three angels wearing vestments who are also kneeling in prayer (fig. 3). It has already been suggested that an angel wearing vestments may appear as a Eucharistic symbol in any scene from the life of Christ,<sup>10</sup> but perhaps their roles could be explored further. Even when Mary is shown standing and holding the Christ Child, for example at Biertan (fig. 4), this is still not a realistic depiction of a mother and child. The child is displayed naked on a white cloth, which is reminiscent of the corporal and thus is able to allude to the Eucharistic significance of such compositions.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the Virgin and Child are surrounded

<sup>8</sup> Vida J. Hull, "The Sex of the Saviour in Renaissance Art: The Revelations of Saint Bridget and the Nude Christ Child in Renaissance Art," *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993): 77-112 (here 79).

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, 78-9.

<sup>10</sup> M.B. McNamee, "Further Symbolism in the Portinari Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 45 (1963): 142-3, suggests that angels garbed in the vestments of the sub-ministers of a high mass amount to a conscious symbol of a mass where Christ himself is the celebrant vested in the chasuble of his flesh. M.B. McNamee, "The Origin of the Vested Angel as a Eucharistic Symbol in Flemish Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 54 (1972): 263-78. The long tradition in medieval liturgical drama of presenting angels in the vestments of sub-ministers of the mass could be held to account for the development of a similar tradition in Flemish art.

<sup>11</sup> For the Eucharistic meaning of Infancy cycles see Barbara Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece. Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 41-78. Hull, "The Sex of the Saviour," 93-4; Julia I. Miller, "Miraculous Childbirth and the Portinari Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 77 (1995): 249-61.

by angels who are holding another piece of white cloth. The angels seem to be celebrating the Eucharist and thus function as priests (ministrants).<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 4: Biertan, Nativity (photo: Maria Crăciun)

At Băgaciu (Bogeschdorf, Szászbogács), the Nativity episode is perhaps even more interesting. The foreground is occupied by Mary and Joseph, who adore the naked Christ Child. The child is lying on a white cloth held by angels. Although the angels are not wearing vestments on this occasion, they still seem to be acting as priests (ministrants) celebrating the Eucharist. This bears an additional liturgical allusion as often in

<sup>12</sup> McNamee, "The Origin of the Vested Angel," 263-4, argues that angels are always dressed in the vestments of deacons and sub-deacons at a mass.

the liturgy Christ is referred to as the “bread of angels.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, the scene is witnessed by an angel who hovers overhead.

At Sebeș (Mühlbach, Szászsebes) the Nativity, depicted on the exterior of the mobile wings, is conflated with the Adoration of the Shepherds; Mary is kneeling in prayer next to the Christ Child, while Joseph is standing, holding a rosary. The shepherds are kneeling in prayer on the other side of the naked Christ Child, who is lying on a white cloth. The child is attended by an angel, who again seems to be playing a liturgical role alluding to the identity between the body of Christ and the bread of the sacrament.<sup>14</sup> The naked Christ Child is also lying on a white cloth and attended by angels in the Nativity at Soroștin (Schorsten, Sorostély). This again suggests ministering angels engaged in a liturgical ritual.

Thus, in Nativity episodes angels are not mere messengers, although they do announce the birth of Christ to the shepherds. They are also warrantors of the special nature of the Christ Child. They function as mediators of the divine; they make the sacred accessible by acting as priests in a metaphorical enactment of the sacrament which foreshadows later events and the sacrifice of Christ.

If one considers compositions related to the life of the Virgin, the angel is also an important bearer of news in the Annunciation to Joachim, which is part of the story of the early life of the Virgin according to the *Protoevangelium of James*. After his offering to the temple is rejected because he has no children, Joachim, the Virgin’s father, retreats to the desert to mourn. An angel appears to him and gives him the news that a child with an exceptional destiny will be born to him and his elderly wife, Anne, until then barren. According to popular belief, conception took place when the two met at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> On both occasions when this episode is represented in Transylvanian altarpieces, it is conflated with the Meeting at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem. In both cases, the Annunciation episode is shown in the background of the

<sup>13</sup> Barbara G. Lane, “*Ecce Panis Angelorum*”. The Manger as Altar in Hugo’s Berlin Nativity,” *The Art Bulletin* 57 (1975): 476-86, mentions two examples: a Benediction formula of Christmas mass in the Gregorian Sacramentary (“and He made him who is the bread of angels in the manger of the church be food for the faithful creatures”) and the sequence composed by Thomas Aquinas for the *Corpus Christi* mass “Here is the bread of the angels made food for the travellers” (479).

<sup>14</sup> Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece*, 53, 59, 70-1, mentions the association of the child with the host, of the manger with the altar and with the tomb. Lane, *Panis angelorum*, 482-4, suggests that, generally, the tomb-like shape of the manger and the liturgical vestments of the angels all enhance the Eucharistic nature of the Nativity scene.

<sup>15</sup> *Anna concepit per osculum Joachimi*, Suzanne L. Stratton, *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 21-3, argues that the osculatory conception at the Golden Gate is described explicitly in a 1491 contract made with the Castilian painter Ferrando Camarge to decorate a chapel of the Virgin at Vich. Sometimes an angel is included in the scene of the embrace as a divine presence which draws Anne and Joachim together. For example, Pedro Berruguete used this device on a panel for the altarpiece of the church of Santa Maria in Becerril de Campos near Palencia.

composition. At Biertan, Joachim is depicted against a desert/mountainous landscape and shown in conversation with the angel. At Sebeș, Joachim is in the desert with the shepherds and the angel, who brings him the news of the forthcoming miraculous birth, hovers overhead. In both cases, the angel announces miraculous events caused by divine, supernatural intervention. God gives life where no life is possible.<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 5: Mălăncrav, Dormition and Assumption (photo: Maria Crăciun)

In narrative cycles concerning the life of the Virgin, angels are also present in Dormition/Assumption scenes. At Mălăncrav (fig. 5), angels are part of the heavenly hosts who welcome the Virgin, whose soul and body are received by Christ. Christ bends towards the Virgin, depicted in the tomb, and takes hold of her actual body, not just of the swaddled infant that is generally understood to represent her soul. It is obvious that in this case the angels are witnessing a miraculous event, but they are also acting as a heavenly court which will receive the Virgin.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 8, point out that Orthodox speculation placed severe limits on the agency of angels as they could not perform miraculous acts on their own account.



Fig. 6: Mălâncrav, central panel (photo: Maria Crăciun)

Angels are also present in Glorification scenes. At Mălâncrav (fig. 6), the Virgin is shown enthroned and crowned, wearing rich brocade with golden motifs.<sup>17</sup> Besides arguing that the crown of Mary is also an *aureola*, a symbol of Mary's special status as both Virgin and Mother,<sup>18</sup> Hall and Uhr suggest that the text of the *Magnificat* was of importance for the iconography of the Crowned Virgin. The *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) is

<sup>17</sup> An analogy is to be found in Hungary in the St. Mary altar from the St. Andrew church in Liptovsky Ondrej nad Vahom (Liptószentandrás) (1480). The central panel shows Mary glorified by angels; Gyöngy Török, *Gótikus szárnyasoltárak a középkori Magyarországon* (Gothic winged altarpieces in medieval Hungary) (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2005), 41, plate 15.

<sup>18</sup> Edwin Hall and Horst Uhr, "Aureola super Auream: Crowns and Related Symbols of Spiritual Distinction for Saints in Late Gothic and Renaissance Iconography," *The Art Bulletin*. 67 (1985): 567-603 (here 575). All saints who received the *aureola* or crown did so as a consequence of special actions such as martyrdom or virginity.

the Virgin's song of praise in the framework of the Incarnation narrative. This was a particularly familiar scriptural text at the time since it was used every day at the canticle for Vespers. Many persons simply knew the words by heart and thus the *Magnificat* served as a daily reminder of the mystery of the Incarnation. In the panel of Mălâncrav, a host of angels are holding a background of golden brocade behind her, while other angels are playing musical instruments. Similarly, angels with musical instruments are depicted on the intermediate panels at Proștea Mare (Grossprobstdorf, Nagyekemező) and lead one to believe that they formerly flanked a Glorification panel.



Fig. 7: Hălchiu, Gethsemane (photo: Maria Crăciun)

Angels are also present in Passion cycles. They primarily make an appearance in the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane compositions. While the apostles are sleeping, Jesus is kneeling in prayer, generally facing a rock. In most compositions, a chalice placed on the rock foreshadows the events to come. Sometimes, however, an angel is also present, although this is only mentioned in the Gospel of Luke 22:43: “and there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.” This is given visual expression in the three-panel predella of Șaeș (Schaas, Segesd), which includes the Geth-

semane episode. The angel is kneeling on the rock where the chalice is placed. Again the angel functions as a sort of herald, anticipating, warning against and prophesying the events to come. At Hălchiu (Heldsdorf, Hőltővény) (fig. 7) the angel who appears to Christ is also holding a cross.<sup>19</sup> This alludes directly to the Crucifixion, to the fate that Christ accepts by uttering the words quoted in the Gospels (Matthew 26:42: “O, my father if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done”).<sup>20</sup> The angel is able to show both Christ and the faithful what the future will bring. Thus, the composition also adds meaning that is not present in the New Testament. The angel not only comes to strengthen, to provide comfort, he is also a messenger who predicts events to come.



Fig. 8: Sebeș, Resurrection (photo: Maria Crăciun)

<sup>19</sup> This representation has an analogy in medieval Hungary in the St. Nicholas church of Lučky pri Kremnici (Jánosrét, Honeshay), 1480, where in the Gethsemane scene, the angel is also holding a cross; Török, *Gótikus színművelődés* 46, plate 20.

<sup>20</sup> The episodes are also mentioned in Mark 14:32-6, Matthew 26:39, Luke 22:39-42.



Angels are sometimes present in the Resurrection scene in agreement with the Gospel narrative: for example, in Matthew 27:2-4, “the angel of the Lord descended from Heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it.”<sup>21</sup> At Sebeş (fig. 8), the Resurrection is depicted on the fixed wings of the altarpiece. It is a complex composition, as several episodes which allude to different moments in the narrative are conflated in the compositional field.<sup>22</sup> In the foreground, one can see the sleeping soldiers and the resurrected Christ, while in the background one notes the three women coming to the grave. Also in the background is a little scene showing Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene (The *Noli me Tangere*) and the apostles on the road to Emmaus. The Resurrection is witnessed by an angel, who again seems to be there to attest the miraculous nature of the event and divine intervention, the presence of the sacred, experienced as always from within the profane.<sup>23</sup>

The Resurrection of Christ is also depicted at Mediaş (Mediasch, Medgyes), on the exterior of the moveable wings. Again a complex composition includes several moments of the narrative, the women coming to the grave as well as the Harrowing of Hell. In the centre of the composition, the resurrected Christ is stepping out of the tomb, while an angel lifts the stone covering the sarcophagus and the soldiers are sleeping. Here, visually as well as actually, the angel is not just a witness but also a direct participant in the miraculous event.

At Prejmer (Tartlau, Prázsmár), the angel is not present in the Resurrection scene itself. He appears, however, in the composition showing the Three Maries at the side of the grave. The stone cover of the sarcophagus has been removed, the tomb is empty and an angel is holding up the shroud as additional evidence of the absent body.

Thus, in the Passion narrative, the angel is in turn a messenger, a prophet, a witness, and an actor, a direct participant in supernatural occurrences. He makes the sacred accessible to human beings such as the three women who find the empty grave, to whom he shows the shroud.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See also Mark:16:2-6, where the angel is not mentioned explicitly; Luke 24:1-7 and John 20:11.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, “Miraculous Childbirth,” 250, suggests that background narratives generally serve to expand the temporal dimension of the painting referring to events preceding, contemporary with, and subsequent to the one depicted in the foreground.

<sup>23</sup> Robert W. Scribner, “Cosmic Order and Daily Life: Sacred and Secular in Pre-Industrial German Society,” and “Ritual and Popular Belief in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation,” in idem, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1987), 1-16 and 17-48.

<sup>24</sup> Pleşu, *Despre îngeri*, 264, suggests that angels divide the distance which separates humans from the absolute into a series of accessible segments. They bring the divine closer to humans. Marshall and Walsham, “Migrations,” 9, argue that medieval theological tracts and devotional literature are replete with examples of miracles performed through the agency of angels and accounts of visions in which they appear with revelations, admonitions, and disclosures to humble clergy and laity as well as to privileged saints.

Angels are also present in compositions which are not narrative but rather fall within the more elusive category of *Andachtsbilder*, symbolic depictions capable of expressing the mysteries of faith and theological concepts central to the late medieval religious world and meant to strengthen the emotional identification of the viewer with the object of devotion.<sup>25</sup> Angels often appear in *Vir Dolorum* compositions, images which have been extracted from their narrative context (the death, lamentation and entombment of Christ) in order to increase their devotional potential.<sup>26</sup> In this case angels are shown holding either *Arma Christi* (the instruments of the Passion) or collecting the blood of Christ into chalices.



Fig. 9: Sibiu, central panel (photo: Maria Crăciun)

<sup>25</sup> Reindert L. Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion. Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child 1450-1550* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 1994), 1-14, 78-81.

<sup>26</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "Imago Pietatis: Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des 'Schmerzensmannes' und der 'Maria Mediatrix'" in *Festschrift für Max Friedländer am 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1927), 261-306. Louis M. La Favia, *The Man of Sorrows. Its Origin and Development in Trecento Florentine Painting, a New Iconographic Theme on the Eve of the Renaissance* (Rome: Edizioni Sanguis, 1980).

There are two examples of angels holding *Arma Christi* in Transylvanian panel painting, on the predella at Șaeș and on the intermediate panels at Dupuș (Tobsdorf, Táblás), while angels with chalices are present on the predella of Tătărlău and the central panel from the collection of the Brukenthal Museum of Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) (fig. 9). The meaning of such compositions is overtly liturgical.<sup>27</sup> By coming into contact with Christ's blood, the angels are obviously fulfilling the role of celebrants in a heavenly re-enactment of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Thus, as far as function is concerned, in all these episodes the angel is the messenger of the Lord, a herald and sometimes a prophet, the witness of divine intervention, a warrantor of the miraculous nature of the events. The appearance of the angel signposts the presence of the sacred. The angel mediates; he makes the sacred accessible to mere humans and is often a direct participant in miraculous events. In his mediating function he often performs as a priest (or a ministrant) in metaphorical enactments of the sacrament where the Christ Child is equated with the host. Finally, the angel provides a model of piety, of devotional practice for the faithful.

#### REPRESENTATIONS OF ANGELS

But we are left with a question. How are angels different from other mediators of the sacred, for example, saints? Saints also make the sacred accessible to humans in the profane realm, either through miracles they perform during their lifetimes or thorough supernatural events which occur at their graves or in the presence of their relics, their material remains.<sup>28</sup> In a sense, this statement highlights one of the main differences. Unlike angels, saints were once ordinary human beings who earned divine favour and their special status through the intensity of their faith.<sup>29</sup>

One other significant difference is that saints are always protectors of the living and intercessors on their behalf. Humans pray to saints in order to secure their protection and intercession,<sup>30</sup> although this idea may also create a degree of confusion as the

<sup>27</sup> Dóra Sallay, "The Eucharistic Man of Sorrows in Late Medieval Art," *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 6 (2000): 45-80. For a discussion of Transylvanian examples see Maria Crăciun, "Eucharistic Devotion in the Iconography of Transylvanian Polyptych Altarpieces," in *Religious Ceremonials and Images: Power and Social Meaning (1400-1750)*, ed. José Pedro Paiva (Coimbra: Palimage Editores, 2002), 191-230.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>29</sup> Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography. Speaking the Saint* (London: Routledge, 2000); Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country. Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Robert N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c. 1215-c. 1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 142-72; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 155-206.

notion of the guardian angel is not completely alien to us.<sup>31</sup> However, the guardian angel is not an infinitely benevolent, motherly protector. He is more like an exacting pedagogue who guides the human soul back to its heavenly home.<sup>32</sup>

Although much less frequently, angels also appear as patrons who introduce their protégés to the heavenly court or simply act as intercessors. This is a situation encountered especially in the case of the Archangel Michael, who introduces the donor of the altarpiece of Mălâncrav, Mihály Apafi, to the enthroned Virgin and Child (see fig. 6). The angel stands behind Michael and prays with him to Jesus,<sup>33</sup> rather than being prayed to by the donor. This is, in fact, in agreement with scriptural texts where the angel is presented as allergic to idolatry (Apoc. 22: 8-9). The angel instructs John the Evangelist to worship God and not make him the object of idolatrous actions such as throwing himself at his feet.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, the Archangel Michael appears twice in this altarpiece as he is also depicted full-length on the fixed wings (fig. 10). In this case, the iconographic type is more that of the dragon slayer combating the forces of evil and his appearance is somewhat different.<sup>35</sup> Although a rich mantle is still part of his attire and he has beautiful wings which look like peacock feathers, he is also wearing full armour. Although there is a strong Byzantine tradition where angels are depicted in military garb as they are an army of the Lord fighting the forces of evil,<sup>36</sup> the presence of armour at Mălâncrav can be connected to the military career of the Apafi family and the wish of the donor to depict his protector in a manner he could identify with.<sup>37</sup> The presence of the second depiction and the way that the angel introduces the kneeling donor suggest that, in the case of Mălâncrav, Michael is treated as a saint.

<sup>31</sup> Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 10, quote Matthew 18:1-10 and Acts 12:15 to argue that it was commonly held in the Middle Ages that all humans were assigned a specific angel to watch over them during their lives and to help them choose good over evil. This was argued by Thomas Aquinas and reiterated in later devotional texts.

<sup>32</sup> Pleșu, *Despre îngeri*, 81-121. Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 8, suggest that in monastic space angels were envisaged as exemplars of the life of perfect chastity, humility, and obedience and as unseen guides who kept their charges under constant surveillance.

<sup>33</sup> Pleșu, *Despre îngeri*, 117-9, suggests that when one prays one is never alone. He also points out that the standing angel is a praying angel, a true intercessor. Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 8, suggest that it was assumed that angels joined with humanity in prayer.

<sup>34</sup> Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 4, mention St. Paul's admonition to the Colossians (2:18), which also suggests the limits set on the veneration of angels. Finally, the synod of Laodicea officially prohibited the worship of angels.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Künstle, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1928), 249.

<sup>36</sup> Pleșu, *Despre îngeri*, 30, suggests that the angel is primarily a soldier, a fighter.

<sup>37</sup> For the history of the Apafi family see Anca Gogăltan, "Patronage and Artistic Production in Transylvania. The Apafis and the Church in Mălâncrav (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries)," PhD thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2002), 39-50.



Fig. 10: St. Michael: Mălâncrav, wing of the altarpiece (photo: Maria Crăciun)

The semicircular *coronamentum* from the collection of the Brukenthal Museum of Sibiu attributed to Vincentius Cibiniensis and considered part of the polyptych of Cisnădie (Heltau, Nagydisznő) represents a death scene where one of the protagonists is the Archangel Michael, who holds the scales and weighs the souls, while another angel receives the soul of the deceased. A devil has also entered the competition for the soul but his intervention is counteracted by Michael, who aims his spear at him. In a way, this episode alludes to Last Judgement scenes where Michael is generally depicted in a similar manner.<sup>38</sup> In another way, it portrays the angel as a companion of humans at the hour of their deaths.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, Michael is depicted here as a composite icono-

<sup>38</sup> For instance, the famous altarpieces of Roger van der Weyden (c. 1450) and Hans Memling (c. 1470). Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 4, suggest that in the books of Daniel, Jude and Revelations, Michael is accorded special importance in combating evil.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Binski, *Medieval Death. Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 29-47.

graphical type. He is at once the *psychostasis*, weighing the souls, the opponent of evil who struggles with the devil, and the *psychopomphos* who guides the souls to heaven.

Michael is also depicted as an iconic, although rather dynamic, figure at Biertan. Although he is included in a group of saints (Rochus, Sebastian and Joseph) on the exterior of the moveable wings, one has no indication that in this case he is a patron saint or that the figure is represented with devotional intent. He is wearing a long yellow robe and holding both a crosier and a sword as he is engaged in battling the devil.

A discussion of the appearance of the archangel brings us back to the issue that has already been highlighted. How do angels differ from saints in how they are represented visually? Are their special status and supernatural nature made obvious in any particular way? Is their role as mediators of the sacred and witnesses of the supernatural signposted by their appearances?

We know from theological discussion that angels have no age or sex.<sup>40</sup> This means that visually they tend to be depicted as young. But are they depicted with a degree of ambiguity in terms of their gender?

If one starts by examining the appearance of angels in all these panel paintings, one notices that they are nearly always depicted as young persons with blond (or light brown), shoulder-length curly hair. This is true of the angel from the Three Marys at the Grave panel at Prejmer. Wearing an alb, he has a youthful face and long blond hair flowing over his shoulders. The angel in the Resurrection scene at Mediaș has brown curly hair and the same youthful face as well as a demure expression. He delicately and effortlessly lifts the cover of the tomb, but he does not look at the viewers, or at Christ, for that matter. His eyes are downcast as if he only engages with his inner world. The shoulder-length curls, the delicate gesture of the angels' hands, the sweet expressions on their faces, and the fleeting, barely-sketched smiles on their lips all contribute to creating a misleading impression concerning their gender.

Occasionally, in the Nativity panels from Sebeș, Soroștin and Băgaciu, angels are depicted as children in a manner typical for the Renaissance. Perhaps strangely, the angel is represented as a child in the Gethsemane panel from Hălchiu (see fig. 7).

If one looks at depictions of the Archangel Gabriel in Annunciation compositions, one comes to the conclusion that he is always represented as young, with blond or light brown curly hair falling to his shoulders. While his features are sometimes slightly more masculine (for instance, at Tătărlău and Băgaciu), in other cases they are overtly feminine, almost childlike (especially at Mălâncrav and Biertan; see fig. 2). At Mălâncrav, the angel's chin is tilted upward as he gazes at Mary with wide-eyed innocence. He thus looks a great deal younger than the allegedly 15-year-old Mary, who looks more like a

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<sup>40</sup> Pleșu, *Despre îngeri*, 30. Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 5, suggest that although angels were mostly considered asexual spiritual beings; the question of the legitimacy of their representation was settled by the second Council of Nicea (787).

placid housewife (see fig. 2). At Biertan, the angel and Mary are similarly sweet-looking, while Mary's startled, slightly defensive hand gesture and the angel's benediction gesture are equally delicate.

The same is true of the Archangel Michael. In the panel from Biertan, he is wearing long flowing robes. His light brown curly hair is shoulder-length and his face has the same sweet expression as elsewhere. In the central panel from Mălâncrav where Michael is introducing the donor to the Virgin (see fig. 6) and in the full-length portrait on the fixed wing of the same altarpiece (see fig. 10), he is depicted with blond shoulder length curly hair and delicate, finely shaped features.

To our modern eyes this may suggest a certain ambiguity in gender terms. In actual fact, far from being effeminate, this was an image of idealised masculinity in the Middle Ages.<sup>41</sup> Beauty was a significant trait of the heroic knight marking his noble descent, important social status, and bravery. A general pattern had been established of representing young noblemen in both texts and images as beautiful, with long flowing, blond curly hair, light complexions and well shaped bodies and limbs. These general characteristics of male beauty did not change much throughout the Middle Ages. Long hair as a marker of high status and beauty had a long tradition from the Merovingians. Additionally, curls and blondness played an important role in making a man handsome, starting with Icelandic sagas and continuing with medieval romances and the literary production of Renaissance Italy.<sup>42</sup> The only ambiguous message is that conveyed by his cleanly shaven face because most male characters have beards in paintings with religious subjects. The only exceptions in Transylvanian panels are depictions of John the Evangelist and Sebastian, who are always represented as young, with smooth and rather feminine faces.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, one can conclude that angels are depicted with features similar to those of young knights, that they are represented as young noblemen. This is nowhere more apparent than in the representations at Mălâncrav. One must note first of all the similarity between the Archangel Michael and the donor of the altarpiece of Mălâncrav (see figure 6). They have almost identical features, light skin, long blond curly hair. This can only lead one to conclude that the angel is represented according to the same aesthetic

<sup>41</sup> Gerhard Jaritz, "‘Young, Rich and Beautiful.’ The Visualisation of Male Beauty in the Late Middle Ages," in *The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways ... Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, ed. Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebők (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 61-80. Pleșu, *Despre îngerii*, 30, suggests that only the Baroque and Rococo consecrated the infantile and feminine dimension of the angel, which has no connection with his scriptural or dogmatic reality. He considers the idea of an angel's femininity as a heresy.

<sup>42</sup> Jaritz, "‘Young, Rich and Beautiful,’” 61-3.

<sup>43</sup> Jaritz, "‘Young, Rich and Beautiful,’” 64, mentions John the Evangelist and Sebastian in a list of saints comprising St. Mauritius, St. George, St. Martin, St. Vitus and St. Achatius who regularly appear as young and handsome.

conventions as a young nobleman. It is also an adequate visual expression for the idea that the angel is the heavenly double of a human being.

In this sense, the image of the Archangel Michael from the fixed panel of Mălâncrav is perhaps the most relevant. Despite the fact that Michael's face is depicted as feminine, youthful, and beautiful, there is an unusual emphasis on the body in this image. Generally, in depictions of angels there is no emphasis on the body. Because they are generally clad in clerical vestments, in long, flowing robes similar to the Roman toga, their bodies are concealed from view. In contrast, at Mălâncrav Michael is wearing full armour so the eye is drawn to his strong body and his shapely limbs, leaving the viewer in no doubt about his gender. This is clearly a construct of idealised masculinity.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, angels are always recognisable by their wings and the absence of halos.<sup>44</sup> If we look at all the representations where angels are present, they are consistently depicted without halos. If one were to widen the area of the comparison to include Hungary, one comes to the conclusion that angels are represented without halos even when they accompany an *Andachtsbild*.<sup>45</sup>

In a way, the absence of halos should not surprise one, as they are an attribute of sanctity. The halo symbolises beatitude, the enjoyment of eternal life in heaven. This is the reward enjoyed by all the saints, which consists in the joy the soul experiences in its union with God. Metaphorically, this state of beatitude came to be called the *aurea* or golden crown and was represented in works of art by what is now called a halo.<sup>46</sup>

What is somewhat more surprising is the presence of the halo in both depictions of Michael at Mălâncrav (see fig. 6 and fig. 10) and in the central panel from Sibiu representing a Eucharistic *Vir Dolorum* (see fig. 9).<sup>47</sup> Interestingly enough, in the first case the

<sup>44</sup> Pleșu, *Despre îngerii*, 136-40, suggests that the theme of flying is intimately connected to angels. There are frequent associations between the soul, birds, angels, heaven, light, volatility and freedom, ascension, song and dance. Angels are therefore winged creatures. So the wing is a distinctive attribute of angels. Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 5, suggest that the idea that angels appeared as winged creatures had become an almost universal iconographic convention. Scholars agree that wings are a useful means of distinguishing angels from saints in iconographical schema. It has been suggested that this attribute derives from the winged Victory figures of Roman art. David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30; S. G. E. Brandon, "Angels: The History of an Idea," *History Today* 13 (1963): 655-65 (here 664).

<sup>45</sup> Török, *Gótikus szärmvasolárók*, 34, plate 13, provides the example of the altarpiece of the Trinity of Mercy at Moso from 1471.

<sup>46</sup> Hall and Uhr, "*Aureola super Auream*," 567-603. They distinguish the *aurea* from the *aureola* or Gothic Crown which was only given to special Christian heroes, martyrs, and virgins who could act as role models for humanity.

<sup>47</sup> It is more difficult to explain the presence of the halo in the case of the angels from the Sibiu panel. One of the difficulties is the lack of information concerning this panel. Its provenance is unknown, although it is dated by inscription to 1515. Because of its specific iconography it is likely that the panel was originally placed on a *Corpus Christi* altar, possible in the parish church of Sibiu where such an altar is known to have existed; Lidia Gross, *Confreriile medievale în Transilvania (secolele XIV-XVI)* (Medieval Confraternities in Transylvania, 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Cluj: Presa universitară Clujeană, 2004), 205-6, 209, 213, 222.



halo occurs in a composition where Michael appears as a patron of the donor of the altarpiece. It has been suggested in the existing literature that the commissioner of the altarpiece of Mălâncrav was Mihály Apafi or his widow, Klára.<sup>48</sup> This makes the Archangel Michael the donor's personal name saint and suggests that on this particular occasion Michael's function as a personal patron and intercessor gives him saintly as well as angelic attributes.

There are other indications that Michael was often treated as a saint and that a cult of the archangel had fully developed. Michael had his own feast days in the western calendar, 29 September and 8 May. They celebrated a fifth-century appearance of Michael on Monte Gargano in Apulia. Churches were frequently dedicated to Michael and pilgrimage sites were associated with him.<sup>49</sup> Because Michael seemed to favour appearances on mountain tops, it has been suggested that churches and chapels situated on high places were dedicated to him.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, several funeral chapels were dedicated to Michael as the medieval "patron saint" of the dead as he had become the angel whom the church invoked at the death of all Christians so that he would lead their souls to heaven. A number of secondary relics are also associated with the places of his appearances, the iron spur and the red altar cloth given to Monte Gargano and the angel's footprint in the marble. Pilgrims gathered rocks from St Michael's sacred sites and used them in church consecration.<sup>51</sup>

It has been suggested that in medieval Hungary the Archangel Michael was fully integrated into the category of saints despite the fact that he does not benefit from a *vita*, a sanctification procedure, relics or instruments of martyrdom that would provide obvious attributes.<sup>52</sup> Michael's roles comprise those of healer, leader of the heavenly host, messenger of God, *psychopomphos*, and guardian angel. The cult of Michael is suggested by numerous place names (21 in the thirteenth century and 48 in the fourteenth century) and church dedications (58 in the thirteenth century and 190 in the fourteenth century).<sup>53</sup> Finally, Michael's cult is suggested by the legislation of early medieval Hun-

<sup>48</sup> Gogáltan, "Patronage," 148.

<sup>49</sup> Marshall and Walsham, "Migrations," 11; Keck, *Angels*, 179, suggests that the sites of his apparitions became the destination of pilgrims and important centers of his cult, such as Monte Gargano in Apulia or Mont St. Michel in Brittany.

<sup>50</sup> Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 103.

<sup>51</sup> Keck, *Angels*, 127, 183.

<sup>52</sup> Edina Eszenyi, "Encounters of St. Michael and the Devil in Medieval Hungary," MA thesis in Medieval Studies (Budapest: Central European University, 2007), 1, 6, 8-11 suggests that being venerated as a saint bestowed a number of semi-hagiographical features on Michael.

<sup>53</sup> András Mező, *A templomcím a magyar helységnevekben* (Church dedications in Hungarian settlement names) (Budapest: METEM, 1996); idem, *Patrociniumok a középkori Magyarországon* (Patronage in Medieval Hungary) (Budapest: METEM, 2003).

gary, which encouraged the observance of the archangel's feast days, and by the sermons where Michael's name was invoked to protect the souls of the dead.<sup>54</sup>

For Transylvania itself, Carmen Florea has suggested that Michael's cult was encouraged on the one hand by the citizens and magistrates of Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár) as the oldest parish church in town was dedicated to the archangel. Thus, the urban community seems to have been concerned to ensure the solemn veneration of their patron saint. The importance of the cult is highlighted by requests for commemorative services, for burial in the parish church, and by donations made specifically to St. Michael's altar.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, the cult of the archangel was framed by the interest of bishops, as the bishopric of Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár) was also dedicated to Michael. The benefactors of the Transylvanian bishopric were mostly nobles. As a warrior saint and guide to heaven, Michael had good chances of becoming the favourite protector of the Transylvanian nobility. Michael's cult was encouraged by indulgences, as remission of sins was obtained by attending church on the archangel's feast days.<sup>56</sup>

If one looks at the Saxon community, Michael's role in the view of villagers is expressed by the inscription on the 1411 bell of Movile (Hundertbücheln, Szászhalom): *Sancti Michaeli ora pro nobis*.<sup>57</sup> He is clearly an intercessor who prays on behalf of others besides the faithful.

Nine churches in this region were dedicated to Michael, five of them situated in villages that belonged either to Alba or Târnava (Kokelburg) county. This would seem to confirm the popularity of the archangel as a protector of the nobility and may further explain his depiction at Mălâncrav, in the church of the Apafi, with saintly as well as angelic attributes.

By surveying a number of compositions that feature angels among their protagonists, this study has aimed to assess their functions in visual narratives (and their textual references) and to explore the particularities of their visual representations. The essay has attempted to investigate the possible links between the functions of angels and the images meant to convey their special status as heavenly creatures. By looking at a specific body of images, I have tried to contextualize these particular iconographic choices within the religious experience of a distinct community.

Thus, this essay is intended to provide insight into the role of the visual in religious communication by focusing on the additional functions which representations forge for angels in religious narratives, sometimes independently of literary sources.

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<sup>54</sup> Eszenyi, "Encounters," 20-2.

<sup>55</sup> Carmen Florea, "The Cult of the Saints in Medieval Transylvania (14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.)," PhD Thesis (Cluj: Babeș-Bolyai University, 2006), 66-95.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, 97-136.

<sup>57</sup> Hermann Fabini, ed., *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen* (Hermannstadt: Monumenta Verlag, 1999).

Based on textual references angels can be defined as celestial beings who carry out God's commands and reveal his will to humanity in a variety of ways. They are intermediaries between God and mankind in anthropomorphic form. This study has aimed to show that visual representations are able to define additional functions for angels, who act as models for the devotional practices of the faithful and as priests (sub-ministrants) who participate in a metaphorical liturgy. Moreover, they are mediators of the divine who make the sacred accessible to humans.

Finally, by looking at the ways angels are represented, this essay has suggested that the special status of these celestial beings and their distinctiveness from saints is expressed by the presence of wings and the absence of halos. Angels are also depicted in anthropomorphic form with the characteristics that define the members of the social hierarchy: youth, beauty, strength. Some cases are more variable, however; at Mălâncrav, for instance, the Archangel Michael is depicted with a halo, a specific saintly attribute, seemingly because he was the personal patron of the donor of the altarpiece. Representing angels in this manner highlights the need to explore the connection between function and image and to establish whether the angel as a messenger is depicted differently from the angel who acts as a personal protector. The evidence suggests that the roles that angels play impact the way they are represented in religious art. Their intercessory function, which equates them with saints, leads to the use of specifically saintly attributes (the halo), while their traditional function as messengers of the divine is expressed through the customary angelic attribute, wings.



## HEAVENLY ENVOYS: ANGELS IN JEWISH ART

*Zsófia Buda*

The abstract nature of God in Judaism required the existence of intermediaries between God and the created world. Therefore, angels as servants and agents of God were present in Jewish thought from biblical times. The word for angel in the Bible is *maleakh* or *maleakh ha-shem*, that is, messenger or messenger of the Lord. Although the Bible does not have a consistent angelology, besides messengers it mentions various kinds of heavenly beings (cherubim, seraphim), who were later classified within the order of angels. In the Bible, the term *maleakh* can refer either to human or divine messengers; and vice versa, the messengers of God sometimes are called men (*anashim*) instead of angels (*malakhim*), and only later texts call them explicitly angels. Although the outer appearance of these divine messengers is not described, due to this blurry terminology for the interchangeability of men and angels they are usually imagined in human form. Furthermore, they are anonymous; the only exception is the Book of Daniel, where the angels have distinct personalities and names (Gabriel and Michael).

The inter-testamental period witnessed a considerable development in the concept of angels. The Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are full of supernatural beings; angels and demons play a significant role in the history of the created world.<sup>1</sup> They have their own names and functions, characteristic appearances, and are arranged into a well-structured hierarchy (or rather hierarchies, since there are several different systems). The study of angels was stimulated by a widespread notion that after the prophetic period had ended the only way to communicate with God was through His angels.

Concerning Late Antique rabbinic literature, the midrashim and the Talmud (especially the Babylonian Talmud) contain much discussion of angels while the Mishnah remains silent on them, perhaps in an attempt to deny their significance. Medieval

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of such works include the *Slavonic Book of Enoch* (or Second Enoch) and the *Book of Jubilees*, which provide a description of the different classes of angels. Concerning demons, the *Testament of Solomon* is a good example.

texts, especially mystical texts (e.g., *Sefer Hasidim* and cabbalistic texts, such as the *Zohar*) and philosophical writings (works of Saadia gaon, Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides), gladly discuss these heavenly beings.

On the basis of the written sources, angels can be described as supernatural beings in the sense that they had endowments humans did not possess. In addition, angels resided in proximity to God and besides keeping contact with the sublunary world they served Him like courtiers would serve an earthly king.<sup>2</sup> Considering these facts, they were usually regarded as superior to humans in power and knowledge and this superiority was expressed in several texts. Nevertheless, men were regarded as more valuable in the eyes of God than angels. Being much more imperfect, humans were subject to evil inclinations, but at the same time they had the opportunity to prove their righteousness and resist evil. Angels, however, not being exposed to evil inclinations, did not have to overcome such temptations. For this reason righteous humans were said to be greater than the ministering angels.<sup>3</sup> Finally, although angels are supernatural, they are only servants of God, but men are rather His beloved children.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE PRESENCE OF ANGELS IN VISUAL ART

Compared with the quantity and great diversity of written Jewish sources on angels, the visual representation of these supernatural beings is rather restricted. Still, the study of this material complements the knowledge of the role angels played in Jewish culture.

Several studies have dealt with angels in Jewish art, although most of them treat the issue as a side question; the motif of angels has been considered one possible source of evidence demonstrating the existence of Late Antique Jewish art and its antecedence to Christian art. Franz Landsberger investigated the origin of the winged angel in Jewish art. He concentrated on the visual sources for the concept.<sup>5</sup> His main point was that the figure of the winged angel appeared first in late antique Jewish art as a result of its encounter with pagan representations such as the Greek Nike and the Roman Genius. Therefore, the "invention" of the winged angel was not a merit of Christian, but of Jewish art.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Kir 22:19 and David Kimhi's commentary on it.

<sup>3</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 93a.

<sup>4</sup> Solomon Schlechter, "God, Israel and Election," in *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Jacob Neuser (Binghamton: Global Academic Publishing, 2001), 66-7.

<sup>5</sup> Franz Landsberger, "The Origin of the Winged Angel in Jewish Art," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 20 (1947): 224-54.

Hannelore Künzl raised the question of why angels appear in biblically themed Hebrew miniatures when they are not mentioned in the biblical text itself.<sup>6</sup> She looked for the answer in Late Antique pagan and medieval Christian art and, surprisingly, paid no attention at all to Jewish biblical commentaries and other extra-biblical written sources.

Unlike Landsberger and Künzl, I will investigate the motif of the angel in the context of Jewish written sources and survey some of the most popular scenes in medieval Jewish book illumination from Europe where angels are among the protagonists. Before turning to the miniatures, however, the sharp controversy between the rabbinical objection against the depiction of angels reflected in Jewish written sources and the existence of such depictions in Jewish manuscripts must be confronted.

#### ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE VISUAL DEPICTION OF ANGELS IN JEWISH LITERATURE

According to written sources, Jewish authorities objected to the visual depiction of angels. The issue was usually discussed in the framework of the second commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of *any thing that is in heaven above*, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." (Exodus 20,4). The argumentation of a halakhic midrash on Exodus, the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, is a good example of the rabbinical train of thought:

... But perhaps he may make an image of the sun, the moon, the stars, or the planets? Scripture says: "And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven," etc. (Deut.4,19). He shall not make an image of any of these. But perhaps he may make an image of the angels (*malakhim*), the Cherubim or the Ophannim? Scripture says: "Of anything that is in heaven." As for "that is in heaven," one might think it refers only to sun, moon, stars, and planets? But it says: "Above," meaning, not the image of the angels, not the image of the Cherubim, and not the image of the Ophannim. He shall not make an image of any of these.<sup>7</sup>

Besides, arguing against the depiction of angels, the rabbis often quoted another verse, Exodus 20,23 "Ye shall not make *with me*..." There are two alternatives for the vocalization of the word aleph-taw-yod: *itti*, that is, with me, or *oti*, that is, me (in the accusative). The interpretation of this verse plays with this ambivalence, as in the Babylonian Talmud:

<sup>6</sup> Hannelore Künzl, "Zum Problem der Engeldarstellung in der jüdischen Kunst," in *Wissenschaftliche Eliten und die nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag: 1999), 121-31.

<sup>7</sup> *Mekilta de R. Ismael*, Yitro, Bahodesh, 6.

“Ye shall not make *itti* [‘with me’]” – [this should be rendered as though it was] “ye shall not make Me” [*otbi*], but the other attendants are permitted. But are the other attendants permitted? Behold it has been taught: Ye shall not make with Me, i.e., ye shall not make according to the likeness of My attendants who serve before Me in the heights, as, e.g., the Ophannim, Seraphim, holy Hayyoth and Ministering Angels! – Abaye explained: “The Torah only prohibited the reproduction of the attendants who are in the highest stratum.” Are, then, those in the lower stratum permitted? Behold it has been taught: That is in heaven – this is to include the sun, moon, stars and planets; above this is to include the Ministering Angels! – That teaching alludes to serving them. But if it is a matter of serving them, even a tiny worm is also [prohibited]!...<sup>8</sup>

Medieval authorities building their arguments on the same biblical verses strengthened this prohibition. The twelfth-century philosopher, Maimonides, in his legal code, the *Mishneh Torah*, refers not only to this banned motif, the angels, but also to the way it was represented and explicitly forbids its pictorial depiction:

It is forbidden to form the likeness of the sun, moon, stars, planets, and angels even on a panel [i.e., a two-dimensional image], for it is written in the Bible “You shall not make with Me...,” that is to say, you shall not make the likeness of My servants who minister before Me on high.<sup>9</sup>

As the context of the prohibition makes it clear, it grew out of the fear of idolatry. The superhuman nature of angels could cause humans to question the unity of God, raise the possibility of two powers in heaven, and tempt them into worshipping angels.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the primary aim of the ban was to prevent idolatry and the making of idols, but in order to build “a fence around the Torah,” it was expanded to the field of pure decoration as well. Nevertheless, extant artistic works show that these objections were not always taken into consideration. One reason for neglecting the prohibition against the depiction of angels could have been the strict adherence to another prohibition – that against the depiction of God. In the scenes where divine intervention was to be pictured, the painter chose the lesser of two evils and depicted an angel, even if according to the biblical text God Himself was acting.

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<sup>8</sup> Talmud Bavli *Avodah Zarah*, 43b.

<sup>9</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Avodat Kokhavim ve-Hukoteihem*, 3:11

<sup>10</sup> The warning against worshipping the hosts of heaven occurs already in the Torah: “And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them...” (Deut. 4:19).



## THE NATURE OF ANGELS

Studying the visual representation of angels, another problem arises. How did Jews imagine angels? Did they endow them with a corporeal body or did they imagine them as incorporeal creatures? This issue appeared in Jewish philosophy and medieval thinkers held different views about it. According to Saadia gaon, although their bodies were different from humans, angels were corporeal creatures, while Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and Nahmanides stated that they were incorporeal and therefore invisible beings. In the latter case, assuming that they functioned as envoys of God, one can ask how humans were able to see and communicate with them? Maimonides discussed the issue in his *Guide of the Perplexed*:

...angels are incorporeal, and have no permanent bodily form independent of the mind [of him who perceives them], they exist entirely in prophetic vision... You know very well how difficult it is for men to form a notion of anything immaterial, and entirely devoid of corporeality... On account of this difficulty the prophetic books contain expressions which, taken literally, imply that angels are corporeal, moving about, endowed with human form, receiving commands of God...<sup>11</sup>

This citation shows that even if angels are incorporeal, one can think about them as bodily creatures and that, in the case of angels, corporeality simultaneously meant being anthropomorphic.

## PAINTING HEAVENLY ENVOYS

Medieval Jews often depicted angels in book illumination, as well as other celestial bodies such as the sun, moon, and stars. Although these depictions contradicted the rabbinical prohibition they were tolerated as they had no connection with idolatry. Angels appear in various kinds of Hebrew manuscripts: Haggadot, Mahzorim (Jewish festival prayer books), Bibles; Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Italian codices alike. They occur in different iconographic scenes, mostly narrative depictions illustrating stories from Genesis, Exodus, and related midrashim. The angels in these scenes function as intermediaries relaying the message of God or intervening in events instead of God.

Almost all Jewish miniatures portray angels as human beings with wings. Sometimes their entire body was depicted; sometimes half of their figure was obscured by a cloud from which they lean down to speak to humans. Beside wings, though less often, halos may also appear as an attribute of angels. There are also images of a number of non-human or semi-human angels; in a few instances angels take on the guise of an animal, with either their entire body or their head.

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<sup>11</sup> *Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:49.

The Bible does not speak about the wings of the angels. This motif may derive from Late Antique pagan representations or from the artworks in the surrounding Christian culture, as Landsberger states, but the concept of the winged angel was also present in medieval Jewish thought. Discussing the nature of angels, Maimonides says:

The motion of flying has been chosen as a symbol to represent that angels possess life, because it is the most perfect and most sublime movement of the brute creation... The motion of flying, frequently mentioned in the Bible, necessitates, according to our imagination, the existence of wings: wings are therefore given to the angels as symbols expressive of their existence, not of their true essence.<sup>12</sup>

Although this image of a winged angel corresponds to artistic representations, one should keep in mind that Maimonides rejected any kind of visual depiction of angels. He must have been thinking of mental images, images existing only in the mind.

In the following, I will discuss five iconographical scenes which present the manifold nature of Hebrew manuscripts concerning the depiction of angels or the divinity. Three of them, the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Burning Bush, and the Law-giving have been chosen as representing some of the most characteristic and popular depictions of angelic or divine intervention. The remaining two are rather unique depictions. The examples follow each other in the order of their biblical chronology.

#### WORSHIP OR CREATION?

The opening miniature of the *Sister Haggadah*, produced in fourteenth-century Catalonia, does not represent a usual scene. According to Joseph Gutmann, the image illustrates the adoration of Adam by the angels (fig. 1).<sup>13</sup> He refers to a legend – reported in various Jewish sources, early Christian texts, and the Quran – which say that the angels were supposed to worship the first man, Adam. Seeing how extraordinary he was, however, they became envious and refused to prostrate themselves before him. Then the rebellious angels were expelled from heaven “and Michael went out and called all the angels, saying, ‘Worship the image of the Lord God, as the Lord God has instructed.’”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Gutmann, “On Biblical Legends in Medieval Art,” *Artibus et Historiae* 19, no. 38 (1998): 137.

<sup>14</sup> *Vita Adae et Evae* 14. For other sources for this legend see Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 99, n. 34.



Fig. 1: Sister Haggadah, Catalonia, mid-14<sup>th</sup> century; London, British Library, Ms Or. 2884, fol.1v: The Creation of Man or Angels prostrating themselves before Adam. From: *Judentum im Mittelalter*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Ursula and Kurt Schubert (Eisenstadt: Kulturabt. des Amtes d. Bgld. Landesregierung, 1978)

The inscription above the miniature makes the interpretation of Gutmann very doubtful. According to the inscription, the image illustrates the moment when God blew the breath of life into the nostrils of the first man.<sup>15</sup> However, instead of God, many angels are shown in the picture surrounding Adam. Although most Jewish literature explicitly emphasizes that God created the whole world, and especially Adam, alone without any assistance, some scholars<sup>16</sup> explain this depiction as an interpretation of the often-discussed biblical sentence: “Let us make man in our image...” (Gen. 1,26). This interpretation states that the sentence is presented in plural because God consulted each of man’s limbs with his heavenly court, that is, with his angels.<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that the angels formed the figure of Adam, however, as it seems in the miniature. Saadia gaon in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* explicitly says that an interpretation sug-

<sup>15</sup> “He blew into his nostrils the breath of life.”

<sup>16</sup> Ursula Schubert, “Die Erschaffung Adams in einer spanischen Haggadah-Handschrift des 14. Jahrhunderts (Br. Mus. Or.2884) und ihre spätantike jüdische Bildvorlage,” *Kairos* 18 (1976): 213-7; Katrin Kogman-Appel, “Coping with Christian Pictorial Sources: What Did Jewish Miniaturists Not Paint?” *Speculum* 75, no. 4 (2000): 827-8.

<sup>17</sup> This interpretation can be found, for example, in *Beresbit Rabbah*, 12,1 and in the biblical commentary of Rashi on Gen. 1:26.

gesting that this passage means that angels created Adam and the world should be considered heretical. In the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides discusses this interpretation and provides an explanation that excludes such a heretical concept:

These passages do not convey the idea that God spoke, thought, reflected, or that He consulted and employed the opinion of other beings, as ignorant persons have believed. How could the Creator be assisted by those whom He created! They only show that all parts of the Universe, even the limbs of animals in their actual form, are produced **through angels**: for natural forces and angels are identical.<sup>18</sup>

Maimonides, analyzing the incorporeal nature of the angels, says that since it would be almost impossible for men to imagine incorporeal creatures, the prophets describe the angels as if they were corporeal beings, similar in form to human beings. Thus, the miniature depicts the creation of Adam by God, but through His angels. Since angels are otherwise incorporeal and invisible, they are portrayed as humans with wings.

#### THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

Probably the most often depicted scene containing angels is the Sacrifice of Isaac. The scene appears mainly in Ashkenaz Mahzorim decorating liturgical texts connected to Rosh ha-Shanah (New Year), but it is also not rare in Haggadot (private liturgical books for Seder) and in codices containing biblical texts.<sup>19</sup> The appearance of an angel in this scene is based not on midrashic sources, but on the biblical text which attributes the intervention to an angel of God (Gen. 22:11). Post-biblical sources only specify which angel carried out the order of God:

When the angels saw lifting his hand to slaughter his son, they started to weep, and said, 'The knife is right at his neck; how long are you going to wait?' The Holy One Blessed be He immediately said to Michael, 'Why are you standing around? Don't allow him.' Michael at once began to call him.<sup>20</sup>

Besides the usual anthropomorphic angels, there are a few nontraditional angel depictions. In two late thirteenth-, early fourteenth-century South German Pentateuchs, the angel who prevents Abraham from sacrificing his son is portrayed as a bird (fig. 2).<sup>21</sup> Joseph Gutmann in his article on Jewish depictions of the Akedah does not offer an

<sup>18</sup> *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:6.

<sup>19</sup> Gutmann has already surveyed this iconographic type and provided numerous examples in: Joseph Gutmann, "The Sacrifice of Isaac in Medieval Jewish Art," *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 16 (1987): 67-89.

<sup>20</sup> *Pesiqta Rabbati*, 40,8.

<sup>21</sup> Collection of liturgical texts, Southern Germany, late 13<sup>th</sup> c., New York, Library of the Jewish Theological Seminar of America, Ms 8972, fol. 121r; *Regensburg Pentateuch*, Southern Germany, c.1350, Jerusalem Israel Museum, Ms 180/52, fol.18v (fig. 2).

explanation for this iconography.<sup>22</sup> He simply connects these bird-angels to manuscripts produced in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Germany containing animal- or bird-headed human beings (also called the zoocephalic phenomenon), for which there is no satisfying overall explanation.

A possible explanation could be that the angel's ability to fly makes it similar to a bird. Maimonides, analyzing the way in which humans can imagine the otherwise invisible angels, says, "The bird in its flight is sometimes visible, sometimes withdrawn from our sight; one moment near to us and in the next far off: and these are exactly the circumstances which we must associate with the idea of angels." This simile could be closely related to the emergence of this motif.



Fig. 2: Regensburg Pentateuch, Southern Germany, c.1350; Jerusalem Israel Museum, Ms 180/52, fol.18v: Sacrifice of Isaac. From: Ruth Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from Medieval Germany* (Jerusalem: CJA, 1999), 97, fig. 21

Another way of depicting the divine intervention in the sacrifice is to show only an arm out-stretched from a cloud grasping the hand of Abraham or the already lifted knife (sometimes sword). Such depictions can be found, for instance, in the *Sarajevo Haggadah* and the *Hispano-Moresque Haggadah*.<sup>23</sup> Since the Bible here explicitly speaks

<sup>22</sup> See note 19.

<sup>23</sup> *Sarajevo Haggadah*, fol. 8r, Sarajevo National Museum; *Hispano-Moresque Haggadah*, Castile, Spain, c. 1300, fol.93v, London British Library, Or. 2737.

about the angel of the Lord, it must be the hand of an angel, and not – as it is sometimes understood – the hand of God.<sup>24</sup>



Fig. 3: Hamburg Miscellany, Middle-Rhine, second quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> c.;  
© Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, ms Hebr. 37, fol.1r: Sacrifice of Isaac

#### ANGELS IN THE STAGE OF POLEMIC

In the *Hamburg Miscellany*, a manuscript produced in fifteenth-century Germany, the Sacrifice of Isaac decorates the Amidah (a prayer) of Rosh ha-Shanah (fig. 3). Several other events surround the sacrifice in the miniature. In the upper left corner, an angel hovers in the sky blowing a *shofar* and holding the judgment scales measuring good

<sup>24</sup> For example, in the case of the *Hispano-Moresque Haggadah* at the recent exhibition of the British Library entitled *Sacred Texts: Explore Treasures of the World's Great Faiths* (<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/castilems.html>).

and evil deeds. A small black devil tries to pull down the left pan of the scales, the pan of sins. In the lower right corner stands another angel, holding the hand of a small figure. There is a Jewish legend saying that Abraham inflicted a wound upon Isaac, who was then carried to Paradise by an angel for three years.<sup>25</sup> The small figure therefore can be identified as the child Isaac coming back from the Garden of Eden to this earthly world. The angel in the left corner with the scales and the *shofar* is connected to the festival of Rosh ha-Shanah. The scales show that this festival was considered to be a day of judgment when God measures the deeds of men. The *shofar*, the horn of the ram that was substituted for Isaac, serves to remind God of the sacrifice of Abraham. In addition, it refers to the resurrection, when the ram's horn will be blown.

This compound iconography has a possible polemical connotation. As a prototype of martyrdom, the sacrifice of Isaac was suitable to intimate the dark events that had taken place in the near past. During the pogroms against the Jewish communities of medieval Ashkenaz, a large number of Jews committed suicide and/or slaughtered their families so that they could avoid forced conversion or death at the hands of the enemy. The massacres started during the First Crusade with ideological support from the crusading ideology. Twelfth-century Jewish chronicles reporting on the events of the First Crusade interpreted the reaction of the Jews to the attacks as *kiddush ha-shem*, the sanctification of the Name of God, and made a parallel between these sacrifices and the sacrifice of Abraham.<sup>26</sup> The small devil did not manage to pull down the pan of sins; the sacrifice is so great that it would balance out the evil deeds. As a reward for the *kiddush ha-shem*, the martyrs, similarly to Isaac, will "dwell among the pillars of the world, dining in the Garden of Eden in the fellowship of the righteous."<sup>27</sup> The sacrifice of Isaac, expanded with the judgment of deeds, the reference to the resurrection, and the ascension of Isaac to the Garden of Eden, may be interpreted as a polemic in response to the ideology of Christian attacks. It may have been meant to demonstrate that the real martyrs and the beloved nation of God that will be redeemed at the end of time were not the Christians but the Jews, who, like Abraham and Isaac, sacrificed their own and their children's lives in the name of God.

#### THE THREE FACES OF REVELATION

The biblical cycles of the Spanish Haggadot provide a great opportunity to compare the iconography of identical biblical scenes. The depiction of the Burning

<sup>25</sup> *Midrash ha-Gadol* I, 327.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God. Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 63-4.

<sup>27</sup> "Chronicle of Solomon bar Samson of Mainz," in *Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Tzarefat*, ed. A. M. Habermann (Jerusalem, 1945), 48-9; Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God*, 74.

Bush is especially interesting as concerns the representation of angels. The *Sarajevo Haggadah*, probably insisting more on the rabbinical prohibition, makes great effort to avoid the depiction of angels. The artist indicates the angelic presence as a golden wing-like form and some golden rays shining out among the burning branches (Fig.4). The angel of the *Golden Haggadah*, on the other hand, is an anthropomorphic figure with wings and a halo – similar to thirteenth-century French Gothic depictions (Fig.5). The *Kaufmann Haggadah* goes even further; instead of a winged humanoid angel it shows a figure in the bush that is very similar to portrayals of the Christian Christ (Fig.6).<sup>28</sup> The figure does not have wings, and his hairstyle, gestures and the halo around his head are reminiscent of contemporary depictions of Jesus. The concept of Christ as an angel was present in Christian theology and he was often depicted as the being in the Burning Bush in medieval Christian art.



Fig. 4: Sarajevo Haggadah, Catalonia, c. 1350; Sarajevo National Museum, fol. 21v: Burning Bush.  
From *The Sarajevo Haggadah*, ed. Z. Ivanković (Sarajevo: Rabic, 2008), 15

These three miniatures represent, on the one hand, three different stages in the use of Christian models, and, on the other hand, various attitudes towards the rabbinical

<sup>28</sup> This was discovered by Alexander Scheiber, *The Kaufmann Haggadah*. Facsimile edition with an introduction by A. S. (Budapest: Publishing House of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1957), 17; Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Kaufmann Haggada*. Introductory volume (Budapest: Kultura International, 1990), 19.



objection against the visual representation of angels. Moses' behavior clearly represents these different stages and attitudes. The *Sarajevo Haggadah* could be called the most "Jewish" or the most traditional, in the sense that its depictions do not employ Christian models. It carefully avoids the representations of the angel, and its Moses turns his head and hides his face lest he sees the divine apparition. Even his animals turn away from the burning bush. The *Golden Haggadah* clearly follows Christian models in the depiction of a beautiful anthropomorphic angel. Moses appears twice in its miniature; once he is approaching the strange phenomenon covering his face with the cloak but glancing upwards towards the angel; second, he is shown kneeling in front of the bush and gazing at the angel. Finally, Moses in the *Kaufmann Haggadah*, where the artist did not hesitate to use an unambiguously Christological motif, stands bravely in front of the divine appearance, not covering his eyes but gazing straight at the divine. Unlike the other two works, he did not even take his shoes off.



Fig. 5: Golden Haggadah, Catalonia, 1320-1330; London, British Library, ms. Add. 27210, fol. 10v: Burning Bush. From: Bezael Narkiss, *The Golden Haggadah* (London: British Library, 1997), 39, fig. 25

This same difference is true for all of the picture cycles of these Haggadot. The *Golden Haggadah* includes many midrashic elements in the biblical cycle. Its artist or artists often chose to depict their midrashic interpretation rather than the biblical text itself.<sup>29</sup> That is why angels also appear in the episodes where, according to the biblical text, God Himself was acting. Such episodes include the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the Reproach of Cain after Abel's murder. Explicit midrashic influence can be discovered in the scenes where the bible speaks about men and later interpretations identify them as angels. The miniatures of Abraham's Hospitality and Jacob Wrestling with an Angel are typical examples of the latter case. Most of these episodes are missing from the cycle of the *Kaufmann Haggadah*, where only the scenes of the Exodus were illustrated. However, the Burning Bush and the Test of the Child Moses<sup>30</sup> show that there was a tendency to depict the divine in anthropomorphic form.



Fig. 6: Kaufmann Haggadah, Catalonia, 14<sup>th</sup> c.; Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Ms. A 422, fol. 59v: Burning Bush. From Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *Kaufmann Haggada* (Budapest: Kultura International, 1990), facsimile – no page number

<sup>29</sup> One of the main characteristics of Jewish art is the inclusion of midrashic elements in an otherwise traditional Christian iconography. The patron or the artist of the Hebrew manuscripts not only copied the Christian works of art; he translated them into his own language. While the style of miniatures adorning Hebrew books was in most cases almost indistinguishable from the style of Christian works, their iconographical details made them uniquely Jewish. This general observation is true of the depiction of angels as well.

<sup>30</sup> *Exodus Rabbah* 1:18, etc.

In contrast, the *Sarajevo Haggadah* insists more strongly on the text of the Bible. In the scenes where the Bible mentions *God*, the painter uses golden rays. Where the Bible mentions the *angel of God*, the painter uses other solutions: in the Sacrifice of Isaac, he represents the angel as an out-stretched arm, in Jacob's dream, he painted distorted, rather statue-like anthropomorphic figures not showing their heads, while in the Burning Bush, he refers to the presence of the angel with only a shining golden wing.

All three manuscripts were produced in fourteenth-century Catalonia. In spite of their closeness in space and time, they relate to the depiction of angels and divine quite differently. Their attitudes range from the strictly observant (*Sarajevo Haggadah*) to the coquettish with Christian motifs (*Kaufmann Haggadah*). To understand why one artist chose a more cautious solution and why the other used models more freely, it would be necessary to uncover the circumstances of their production: the identity of their painters and patrons and the intellectual milieu. These factors would provide an explanation for the different attitudes expressed towards the surrounding Christian culture as well as towards their own tradition.

#### ANGELIC ASSISTANTS AT THE LAW-GIVING

From Ashkenaz, most of the extant manuscripts containing angels are in mahzorim. A piyyut (liturgical poem) connected to the festival of Shavuot is often illustrated with the scene of the Torah Giving, when Moses stands on a hill and the tablet is given to him from heaven. Sometimes the tablet is presented descending from a cloud without showing who is lowering it, sometimes, however, a hand or an angel handles it to the Forefather. On a miniature of the *Dresden Mahzor*, a large hand stretches out from the sky and offers the Law to Moses (fig. 7). Two angels blowing trumpets are present at the event. They are anthropomorphic figures with large wings and their eyes are covered by crowns that have slipped down. Angels are mentioned in several Jewish sources as assistants in the Law-giving. The angels with the crowns recall an early medieval midrash, the *Pesiqta Rabbati*, "When God revealed Himself on the mount of Sinai to give the Torah to Israel, sixty thousand angels descended with Him, each of them carrying a crown to adorn each Israelite with it."<sup>31</sup>

While there do not seem to be any such references in book illumination, written sources relate that angels had reservations about giving the Torah to mankind and were not always benevolent towards humans:

When Moses ascended on high, the ministering angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Sovereign of the Universe! What business has one born of woman amongst us?" "He has come to receive the Torah," answered He to them. Said they to Him, "That secret treasure, which has been hidden by Thee

<sup>31</sup> Pesiqta Rabbati, 21.

for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created, Thou desirest to give to flesh and blood! What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 7: Dresden Mahzor, Lower Rhine, c. 1300; Dresden, Schächsische Landesbibliothek, Ms. A46a, fol. 202v: Giving of the Law. From Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs*, 119, fig. 47

#### HEAVENLY HOSPITALITY

I began this survey with the creation of the first man in the Garden of Eden, and therefore it is suitable to finish with another scene from the same location. There is a representation of the gate of the Garden (fig. 8) in a German Jewish manuscript, the so-called *Bird's Head Haggadah*,<sup>33</sup> produced around 1300. The uniqueness of this manuscript lies in the fact that all the Jewish figures are portrayed with bird-heads, while the Egyptian soldiers and the angels have human heads.<sup>34</sup> There is no satisfactory explana-

<sup>32</sup> *Talmud Bavli*, Shabbat 88b.

<sup>33</sup> *Bird's Head Haggadah*, Jerusalem, Israel Museum, Bezalel Art Section Ms. 180/57, fol.33r.

<sup>34</sup> fols. 15v: Sacrifice of Isaac, 24v: Pursuit by the Egyptians, 33r: Garden of Eden.

tion for this distinction, however, to my mind the painter found the depiction of Jews at least as problematic as that of the angels, if not more so.

The miniature depicts the three Forefathers – Abraham, Jacob and Isaac – approaching a two-storied building inhabited by angels. The winged anthropomorphic angels have human faces while the Forefathers are shown with bird-heads. Originally the human faces were blank; their features were added by a later hand; in the same way, the description above the building saying, “This is the Garden of Eden” was added later. The scene illustrates the verse “This is the Gate of the Lord: the righteous will enter into it.”<sup>35</sup> The three Forefathers were the prototypes of the righteous, and, according to a rabbinical legend, they can enter the Garden of Eden alive.<sup>36</sup> The presence of the angels indicates that the place the three patriarchs are approaching is not the earthly world but belongs to the divine realm.



Fig. 8: Bird's Head Haggadah, Germany, c. 1300; Jerusalem, Israel Museum, Bezalel Art Section Ms. 180/57, fol.33r: The Garden of Eden. From: Mellinkoff, *Antisemitic Hate Signs*, 84, fig. 5

<sup>35</sup> Psalms 118:20.

<sup>36</sup> For reference see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol.1 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 242, n. 307.

## CONCLUSION

Although in the framework of this paper I could not provide a comprehensive survey of the angelic iconography in Jewish book illumination, the examples discussed are suitable for offering some general observations. First, while the stylistic features of the Hebrew miniatures are very similar to those of the surrounding Christian culture, their iconographical details are derived from *midrashic* elements or from special Jewish contexts. Seeing these angelic portraits, the influence of Christian iconography is undeniable, but Jews did not copy their models blindly. Due to the typological interpretation, Christ often appeared in Christian Old Testament narratives, such as the Creation, the Burning Bush, or the Law-giving. Hebrew miniatures, however, almost always replaced the figure of Christ with angels.<sup>37</sup>

Second, the concept of God as the creator and governor of the earthly word and the concept of God as an abstract being were only made compatible with difficulty. One solution to this dilemma was to place intermediaries between God and the created world, intermediaries who carry out His will and can communicate with men. Supernatural beings might serve as mediators and helped preserve the abstract nature of God so that He could be separated from the corporeal world by great distances. As has been observed for the miniatures discussed, this solution was applied with success in the visual representations: Angels were used as substitutes for God and to mark the divine sphere. Thus, the rabbinical ordinances concerning the depiction of angels, probably in order to observe the more important prohibition against the depiction of God, were not always taken into account.

Finally, the artists or patrons were not uniform in their attitude towards the representation of the divine; some insisted more on the rabbinical barriers, others yielded more freely to external artistic influences. As the example of the three Burning Bush miniatures shows, these differences were present even in the same geographical area and intellectual milieu. Therefore, if one wants to understand and uncover the special Jewish meaning within these depictions, the study of the external artistic influences is not enough. The investigation of the Jewish written sources and the exploration of the intellectual context of the individual codices are also indispensable.

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<sup>37</sup> Among the rare exceptions are the depiction of the Burning Bush in the *Kaufmann Haggadah* (fig. 6), and the scene of the Law-giving in a thirteenth-century French manuscript, the so-called *Kaufmann Mishneh Torah* (vol. IV, fol. 32r; Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection MS A 77).

THE REINCARNATIONS OF ENOCH  
FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE RENAISSANCE

*György E. Szőnyi*

ENOCH, THE MYSTERIOUS PROPHET

A perplexing text, the *Apocalypse of Enoch*, has become a treasure of modern occultists. For example, it was translated into Hungarian by the esoteric philosopher, Béla Hamvas, and the publication appeared during the last days of the war in 1945 (fig. 1: title page of the Hungarian edition).<sup>1</sup> But one does not have to go that far; it is enough to search the internet for Enoch, and various references, including many visual representations, come up. One striking example is the webpage called ‘Zulu Nation,’ which does not originate in Africa; it is an American-international site for hip-hop rock and life style (fig. 2: Enoch’s portrait from the homepage).<sup>2</sup> Who was this Enoch really and what is known about him? My paper is going to answer these questions while concentrating on Enoch’s representations from the medieval and Renaissance periods.

PIECES OF INFORMATION FROM THE BIBLE

The Bible is not too informative. One learns that there were two Enochs: the first was the son of Cain (Gen. 4:17), and thus belonged to the third generation of mankind. The second, the “real” Enoch, was the descendant of Adam’s son, Seth, and was begotten by Jared in the year 622 (Gen. 5:18-9). Enoch lived 365 years; he begot Methuselah in his sixty-fifth year, then he ‘walked with God: and he *was* not; for God took him’ (Gen. 5:24). St. Paul in his letter to the Hebrews remembers Enoch as someone who ‘by faith was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased

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<sup>1</sup> *Enoch apokalypsise*, Hamvas Béla fordításában és bevezetőjével (Budapest: Bibliotheca, 1945; reprint Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.zulunation.com/enoch.htm> (last access 2011-01-31).

God' (Hebrews 11:5). Finally, he is also mentioned in the epistle of Jude: 'And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all..."' (Jude 14-15).

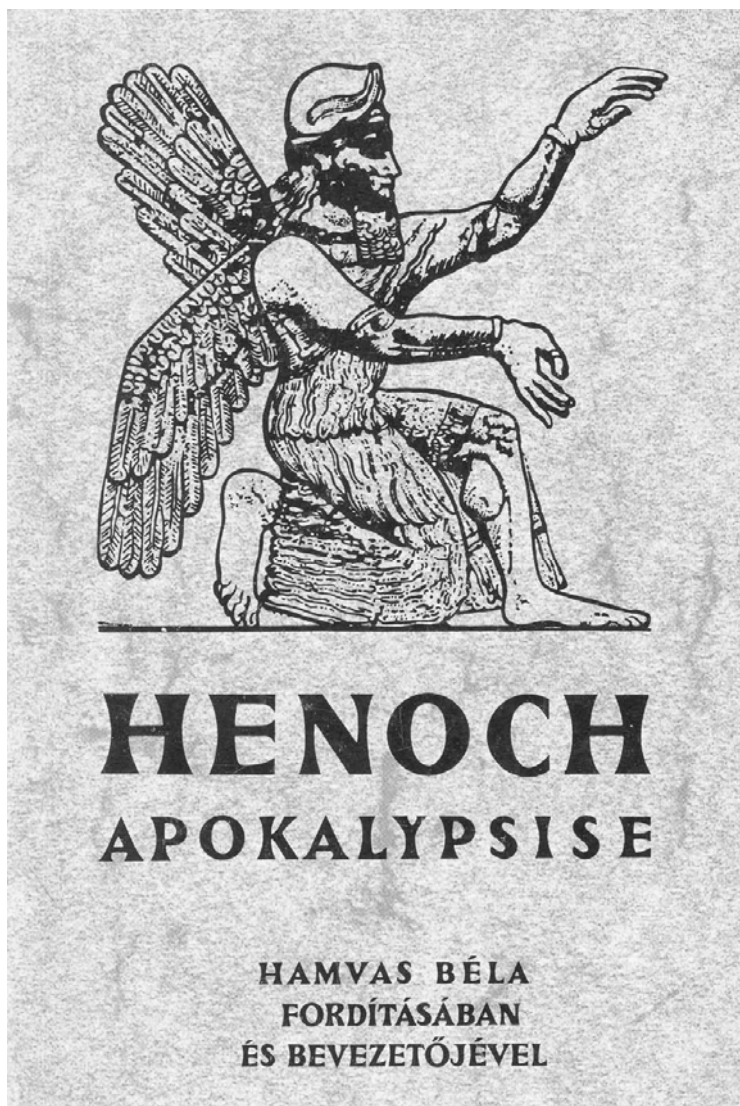


Fig. 1: Béla Hamvas, *Enoch Apokalipsise*  
(Budapest: Bibliotheca, 1945; reprint Vízöntő Könyvek, 1989) frontispiece



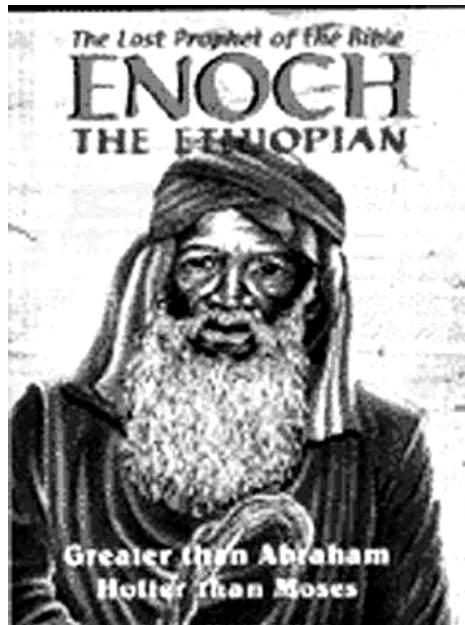


Fig. 2: Enoch as represented on the website of “Zulu nation:” [www.zulunation.com/enoch.htm](http://www.zulunation.com/enoch.htm)  
(last access: 2011-01-31)

#### THE HERO OF THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

The scarce remarks of the Old and New Testaments are abundantly completed by apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature surviving from both the Jewish and Christian traditions.<sup>3</sup> This textual lore is intriguing as well as complicated. An interesting fact is that although the core text, the so-called *Apocalypse of Enoch*, was not known to Europeans until the eighteenth century, hearsay about this material had fascinated European humanists since the time of the Renaissance.

<sup>3</sup> Biblical scholarship defines as apocryphal books which have uncertain provenance or authorship and finally church authorities have excluded them from the canonized collection of sacred books. As opposed to this, the term pseudepigrapha (etymologically meaning ‘with false superscription’) embraces those texts that were in early Christian times ‘attributed to ideal figures in Israel’s past; that customarily claim to contain God’s word or message; that frequently build upon ideas and narratives present in the Old Testament; and that preserve, albeit in an edited form, Jewish traditions that date from the period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200.” James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), xxiv-vi. All in all, there is no great difference between the two terms, except that the word apocrypha carries a touch of value judgment, while pseudepigrapha is a neutral term of Bible scholarship.

At present three texts are known that relate to Enoch in one or another way. The first is the *Apocalypse of Enoch* (abbreviated *1Enoch*) mentioned above, the full text of which has survived only in the Ethiopian language, Ge'ez. It was brought to Europe by James Bruce, a Scottish traveler to Africa, in 1773. The original must have been written in Aramaic or Hebrew, as is attested by the surviving fragments among the Dead Sea Scrolls (fig. 3). Further fragments have survived in Greek and Latin.<sup>4</sup>

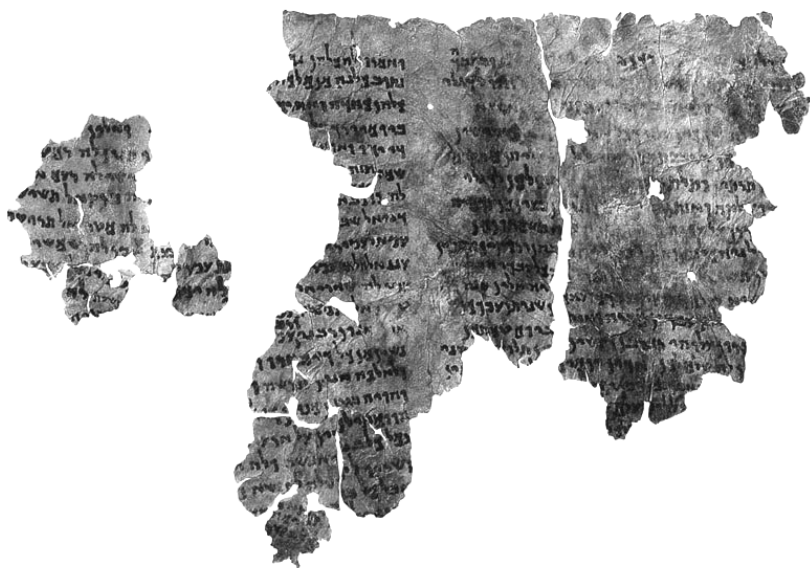


Fig. 3: A fragment from Enoch's Apocalypse in Aramaic from a Qumran scroll (4Q 201-2): <http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/Library/enoch.html> (last access: 2011-01-31)

*1Enoch* consists of the following structural sections: after the introduction, chapters 6-36 relate the story of the fallen angels who had sex with the daughters of men and thus corrupted mankind. When punishment was approaching, Enoch tried to intervene before the Lord for the sinful angels. This part is also called the "Book of the Watchers" and comprises a complex system of angelology.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek fragment dates from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and was found in a Christian tomb. A Latin fragment also exists from the same period. The English critical edition of *1Enoch* was prepared by E. Isaac; see Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 5-89. The original Ge'ez text is in the British Museum and dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century: MS. Orient. No. 485, Fol. 83b; see <http://www.earth-history.com/Pseudepigrapha/Enoch/enoch-main.htm> (last access: 2011-01-31). Among the Qumran scrolls one finds some fragments of the Aramaic version of *1Enoch*; see Géza Vermes, ed., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), 545-9.

The second part presents apocalyptic visions about the Last Judgment. The third part (chapters 72-82) is an astrological treatise and undoubtedly influenced the development of medieval astrology, which I shall touch on below. The fourth part is a vision about the future of Israel that at the same time relates the history of mankind from Adam up to the Deluge. The fifth part is the testament of Enoch.

2*Enoch* is the so-called Slavonic Enoch, which survived in an Orthodox manuscript and was discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its dating and genealogy are uncertain.<sup>5</sup> 3*Enoch* is a Hebrew text, a product of the Merkabah mysticism that flourished between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries A. D. The text has survived in several medieval manuscripts, but was only re-discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Curiously, one of its chapters was printed in Cracow in 1579, but since it was a Hebrew publication European humanists did not take notice of it.<sup>6</sup>

#### ENOCH THE MEDIEVAL HERMETIC KING

None of the texts described above were known in the Middle Ages, at least not to the theologians of Western Christianity. Enoch was nevertheless often remembered by the Church Fathers as well as later divines. For example, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Alexander Neckam wrote that Hildegard von Bingen's visions reminded him of Enoch's inspired imagination.<sup>7</sup>

Enoch definitely exercised a strong influence on medieval Christian iconography. His representations fall under three iconographical types:

1. He usually appeared on Biblical genealogies among the descendants of Adam. A late example for these can be found in Schedel's *Weltchronik*, an incunabulum from 1493 (fig. 4).
2. The second type derives from a motif in Saint John's *Revelations*. When John measures the Temple with a rod-like reed, the angel assigns to him two witnesses who later will be killed by the Antichrist, however, in the end they are resurrected. Although *Revelations* does not name the two witnesses, medieval tradition identified them as Elijah and Enoch and most of medieval iconography capitalized on this scene (fig. 5).
3. The rest of medieval representations picture the event when Enoch disappears because he is elevated to God by angels. Contemporary terminology called this the *translatio* of Enoch (figures 6, 7, and 8: 11<sup>th</sup>-century English miniature; an

<sup>5</sup> See the introduction of F. I. Andersen in the critical edition: Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 91-100.

<sup>6</sup> See the introduction of P. Alexander in the critical edition: Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 223-53.

<sup>7</sup> See Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923-58), vol. 1, 342-5.

11<sup>th</sup>-century Austrian altarpiece, and a 15<sup>th</sup>-century French illumination depicting Enoch's *translatio*).



Fig. 4: Portrait of Enoch from Hartmann Schedel's world chronicle (*Das Buch der Chroniken*), Nuremberg, 1493, fol 10v. Somogyi Library, Szeged

From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards strange, magical texts started proliferating under the supposed authorship of Enoch. Vincent of Beauvais in his *Speculum naturale* refers to the "Book of Enoch." The patriarch also appeared in many works on astrology and alchemy, which characteristically identified Enoch with Hermes Trismegistus, the mythical sage of hermeticism.<sup>8</sup> This is the claim in the so-called "Treatise on Fifteen

<sup>8</sup> Some basic works on hermetism are: Brian P. Copenhaver (ed.), *Hermetica. The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation with notes and introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Arthur D. Nock and André-J. Festugière (ed.), *Corpus hermeticum*, vol I: *Corpus hermeticum I-XII*; vol II: *Corpus hermeticum XII-XVIII, Asclepius*; vol III: *Fragments extraits de Stobée I-XXII*; vol IV: *Fragments extraits de Stobée, Fragments divers* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945-54); Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (ed.), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance* (Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1988); Lynn White (ed.), *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution. Papers read at the Clark Library Seminar, March, 1974* (Los Angeles: UCLA, W.A. Clark Memorial Library, 1977); Paolo Rossi, "Hermeticism, Rationality, and the Scientific Revolution," in *Reason, Experiment, and Mysticism in the Scientific Revolution*, ed. Maria L. Righini-Bonelli and William R. Shea (New York: Science History Publications, 1975); Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: RKP and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964); Luisa Rotondi Secchi Tarugi, *L'ermetismo nell' Antichità e nel Rinascimento* (Milan: Nuovi Orizzonti,

Stars,” which survives in many medieval manuscripts, and it is repeated in Robert of Chester’s *Liber de compositione alchemiae* and in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript “Hermes Mercurius Triplex on the Six Principles of Things,” and so on.<sup>9</sup> Enoch’s lore on angels was also echoed in the spurious medieval manuscript literature on ceremonial magic, including the “Book of Venus,” the *Liber Juratus*, the *Liber lunae* and the various versions of the “Book of Toz.”<sup>10</sup> It also appears that Roger Bacon, the medieval mystical scientist, regarded Enoch highly and mentioned him in his *Secretum secretorum* as someone equal to Hermes.<sup>11</sup>

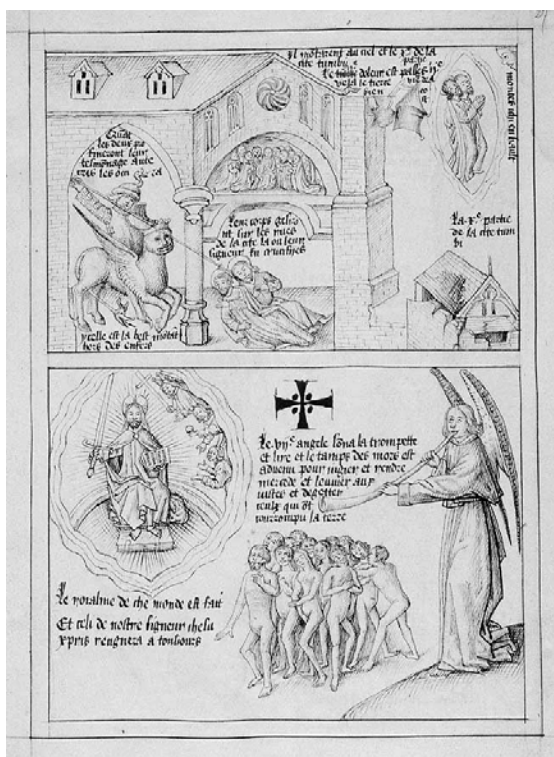


Fig. 5: Paradise. The Hague, MS KB 128 C4, f 27:

<http://www.kb.nl/manuscripts/show/images/128+C+4/page/3> (last access: 2011-01-31)

1998). See also my book: *John Dee's Occultism. Magical Exaltation through Powerful Signs* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Thorndike, *History*, vol. 1, 340.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, vol. 2, 220-7.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy. Between Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1989), 209.



Fig. 6: The *translatio* of Enoch. 11<sup>th</sup>-century English miniature:  
<http://www.loebtree.com/biblical/enoch.jpg> (last.access: 2011-01-31)

#### THE SEARCH FOR ENOCH IN THE RENAISSANCE

The medieval reception of Enoch bordered on heresy, at least from the viewpoint of some church authorities. Upon the emergence of neoplatonic hermeticism in the fifteenth century, the heterodox treatment of the patriarch gained completely new and enlarged dimensions. Next to Hermes Trismegistus it was Enoch who provided the magically minded humanists with examples of deification, or *exaltatio*, a technique of the “ascension on high” so greatly desired by them.<sup>12</sup> In their writings Hermes Trismegistus was interpreted as the reincarnation of Enoch – thus reinforcing their ideological pro-

<sup>12</sup> On the doctrine of *exaltatio* see my cited book *John Dee's Occultism...*, “Introduction.” On the phenomenon of “ascension on high” see Moshe Idel, *Ascension on High in Jewish Mysticism* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2005).

gram that aimed at some syncretism, an amalgamation of the Judeo-Christian tradition and Classical mythology.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 7: The *translatio* of Enoch, Nicholas of Verdun, 1181. Klosterneuburg, Austria:  
<http://www.etf.cuni.cz/galerie/avu/t13001-x.html> (last access: 2011-01-31)

A most notable example is that of Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio. This rather mysterious wandering humanist turned up in Lyon in 1501, and his impressive “miracles” were witnessed (although condescendingly) by one of the great authorities of Renaissance magic, Abbot Johannes Trithemius. Only a few pieces of writing remain

<sup>13</sup> For example, in one of his writings Agrippa von Nettesheim called Trismegistus the reincarnation of Enoch: see Agrippa, *In praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti*, in *Testi umanistici sull'ermetismo*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Rome: Archivio di Filosofia, 1955), 122-3.

from the pen of Mercurio,<sup>14</sup> but there are several eyewitness reports of his activities. According to these he acted as the reincarnation of the famous Classical magician, Apollonius of Tyana, following Hermes Trismegistus, he called himself the “Mercurius secundus,” and as Trithemius sarcastically noted, promised “great, strange and wondrous things.”<sup>15</sup> Although Trithemius claimed similar superhuman qualities about himself, it is perhaps not surprising that he considered Mercurio a charlatan. He mentioned the Italian as an example of the narrow borderline between true, Christian magic and black, detestable necromancy.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 8: The *translatio* of Enoch. French *Biblia pauperum*, c. 1450. The Hague, MS MMW 10 A 15, f. 36v:  
<http://www.kb.nl/manuscripts/show/images/10+A+15/page/17> (last access: 2011-01-31)

<sup>14</sup> The modern critical edition is: Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Ruud M. Bouthoorn, ed., *Lodovico Lazzarelli 1447-1500: The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents* (Phoenix: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 311-29.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology. A Chapter in the Controversy over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 65. On Mercurio see also Walton B. McDaniel, “An Hermetic Plague-Tract by Johannes Mercurius Corrigiensis,” *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, Series IV, 9 (1941-42): 96-111, 217-25; David B. Ruderman, “John Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio’s Appearance in Italy as Seen through the Eyes of an Italian Jew,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 28 (1975): 309-22, and Paul Oskar Kristeller, “Marsilio Ficino e Lodovico Lazzarelli,” *Annali della R. Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 2.7 (1938): 237-62; idem., *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome: Ed. di Storia e di Letteratura, 1956, repr. 1969), 228, 249. The newest results in Mercurio-research are presented in Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli*.

<sup>16</sup> Brann, *Trithemius*, 66



Not everybody, however, was so skeptical and critical about Mercurio. In 1505 Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, the hermetically-minded French humanist, published a curious work in Paris by another Italian hermetist, the deceased Lodovico Lazzarelli's *Crater hermetis*. To this he added the two most famous tracts of the *Corpus hermeticum*, the Greek original, *Pimander*, and the Latin *Asclepius*.<sup>17</sup> Lazzarelli (1450-1500) belonged to the neoplatonist-humanist circle of Ficino and Pontano, and after a while he became an ardent follower of their hermetic teachings. As he himself claimed, his "hermetic turn" was due to Giovanni Mercurio, who appeared in Rome in 1484 and roamed the city with a crown of thorns on his head and preached a new, mystical Christian renovation. Lazzarelli recorded his meeting with Mercurio and there he assumed for himself the name "Lodovicus Enoch Lazarellus Septempedanus." In this treatise he summarized the effect of his experience with Mercurio as follows: "When I with astonished eyes had witnessed the sacred mystery of this unprecedented event, I left the Parnassian hills and everything else, and immediately followed him to Mount Zion – the first of his pupils."<sup>18</sup> From this text it appears that Lazzarelli considered Giovanni Mercurio the reincarnation of Hermes Trismegistus and himself the reincarnation of Enoch.

Lazzarelli's contemporary, the famous Pico della Mirandola, in his *De hominis dignitate oratio*, explained the divine characteristics of humankind with the examples of Adam, Enoch, and Elijah: "the esoteric theology of the Hebrews at times transforms the holy Enoch into that angel of divinity which is sometimes called *malakh-ba-shekhinah* and at other times transforms other personages into divinities of other names."<sup>19</sup>

Cornelius Agrippa, a typical Renaissance magus, and Paracelsus, the inventor of iatrochemical medicine, both mentioned and hailed Enoch's *translatio*. As Agrippa states in *De occulta philosophia*:

These things are not granted to all, but to those whose imaginative and cogitative power is most strong and hath arrived to the end of speculation. ... Now, for example, that the souls abound with so plentiful light of the celestial stars, and hence, a very great abundance of light redoundeth into their bodies; so Moses did shine; thus Socrates was transfigured; so Zoroastres being transfig-

<sup>17</sup> Thorndike, *History*, vol 5, 438. Lazzarelli's treatise was published by Garin (*Testi umanistici...*, 1955), but the authoritative critical edition with an English translation is: Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn, *Lorenzo Lazzarelli*, 165-271. On Lazzarelli see also: Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought*, 221-57; François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes chrétiens de la renaissance* (1964, reprint Milan: Arché, 1985), 74-7; Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1958), 64-72.

<sup>18</sup> Lazzarelli, *Epistola Enoch*, in Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli...*, 149.

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John H. Randall (ed.), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 226

ured, his body was taken up. So Eliah and Enoch ascended to heaven in a certain fiery chariot, so Paul was rapt up into the third heaven (3.43).<sup>20</sup>

Paracelsus was also most interested in Enoch's translation and saw it as an archetypal situation of magical *exaltatio*. As Deborah Harkness has pointed out, Paracelsus drew on biblical sources to create a second Enoch, or *Elias artista*, who would return to the world and reveal occult aspects of the Book of Nature.<sup>21</sup> Among Paracelsus' works it was the *Archidoxa* which raised the questions of primordial knowledge for the first time:

As long as we have the power and knowledge, we possess the capacity of sustaining our life. For Adam attained to such an advanced period of life not from the nature or condition of his own properties, but simply from this reason, that he was so learned and wise a physician, who knew all things in Nature herself...<sup>22</sup>

In the 1960s, Marie Boas also noted Paracelsus' interest in revelative knowledge, describing the German doctor's thought as something that "combined iconoclasm with appeal to 'experience', primarily mystic experience. He attacked reason because it was opposed to magic, and magic was to him the best key to experience."<sup>23</sup> For these reasons he despised the ancient authorities but found a perfect synthesis between science and occult illumination among biblical characters: Adam, the forefather, and his descendant, Enoch.

For Paracelsus as well as for other 16<sup>th</sup>-century occult thinkers, Adam's knowledge was emblemized by his mystical language, which provided him with a direct means of communication with God and the angels. And it was Enoch who was the last man privileged to be able to learn the *lingua adamica*, the key to perfect knowledge so much sought by Renaissance philosophers who all aspired to be among the new elect of the *pansophia*. Many of them, with Paracelsus in the forefront, indeed became convinced that they had come into the possession of universal wisdom:

The celestial treasure, in these last days of grace, has been freely revealed to me from on high, which, indeed, make a true Adam and paradoxical physician, according to the days of Enoch, in the intellects of a new generation. ... There is no doubt, that in that very great multitude of men, mentioned in the fourth book of Esdras, the Lord God will reserve for Himself a small number of

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<sup>20</sup> I quote from the modern English critical edition: H. C. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (tr. James Freake [London, 1651], "completely annotated with modern commentary by Donald Tyson" (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1997), 610.

<sup>21</sup> Deborah Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels. Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 148.

<sup>22</sup> Philippus Theophrastus Aureolus Paracelsus, *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast, called Paracelsus the Great*, 2 vols, ed. A. E. Waite (London: James Elliot 1894, reprint Berkeley: Shambala, 1976), vol. 2, 70. On *Elias artista* see Paracelsus, *Writings*, vol. 1, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Marie Boas, *The Scientific Renaissance, 1450-1630* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 177.

certain elect persons, who will desire faithfully to pursue my Theophrastic doctrine, to love the truth, and help their neighbours in their destitution and diseases, for pure love of God ...<sup>24</sup>

As one can also see from the above quotations, the magically and hermetically minded Renaissance humanists were ambitious to find a way to come into the possession of Adam's language or the angelic language which would provide them not only with universal knowledge but, by reestablishing direct contact with the Creator, would also annul the consequences of the original sin and the Fall.

These enthusiasts pursued occult philosophy in order to gain God's revelative knowledge. In the end several of them became convinced that they had indeed been granted omniscience. This is how Mercurio da Correggio, Lodovico Lazzarelli, and Paracelsus seem to have felt, but the two most perplexing cases were Guillaume Postel and John Dee.

#### ENTHUSIASTS, PHILOLOGY, REVELATION

One of the enthusiastic humanists who passionately researched the legacy of Enoch was the French philologist and orientalist, at the same time a propagator of world peace, Guillaume Postel (1510-1581). The Renaissance scholar William Bouwsma characterized him as:

Postel is at once one of the most interesting and one of the most puzzling figures of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. His spectacular career and the wide range of his interests and activities have frequently attracted the attention of historians, and his name appears in the most various connections. He was the most learned Christian cabalist of his day, one of the earliest systematic Arabists in Western Europe, a pioneer in the comparative study of language, and a humanist of distinction.<sup>25</sup>

Parallel – and in connection – with his interest in oriental studies Postel's main concern was a general religious reformation of the world which would result in the unification of main world religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam). He hoped that on the basis of rational persuasion it would be possible to convince non-Christians of the superiority of the teachings of Christ. At the beginning he placed his trust in the Jesuits, so in 1544 he traveled to Rome and requested admission into the order from Ignatius of Loyola. It soon turned out that the lonely eccentric did not fit in the strict organisation, so he was dismissed. In any case, during his stay in Rome he met an Ethiopian priest who told him about the *Book of Enoch*, as it was known in Africa. This summary completely fascinated

<sup>24</sup> Paracelsus, *Archidoxa*, in idem, *Writings...*, vol. 2, 83.

<sup>25</sup> William J. Bouwsma, *Concordia mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel (1510-81)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), v.

Postel, who immediately wrote a memorandum to the pope suggesting that the *Zohar* and the *Book of Enoch* should be included among the biblical canon based on revelation.<sup>26</sup>

His interest in Enoch must have lead Postel later to the problems of reincarnation, a phenomenon he believed he had experienced himself.<sup>27</sup> In Venice in 1547 he met an elderly nun, Mater Zuana, who was doing charity work in a hospital run for poor people. She so strongly impressed Postel that the French humanist adopted her as his spiritual mother and recognized in her a mystical world-soul – *mater mundi* – calling her also the “New Eve.” Mater Zuana died in 1549 and Postel moved back to Paris, where two years later some strange things happened. During Christmas night, 1551, the humanist fainted and saw a vision in which Mater Zuana told him that she was moving into his body, thus turning Postel’s physical frame into the tabernacle of the holy reincarnation of the world’s female principle. With enochian terminology Postel called this his *translatio* and *restitutio*.<sup>28</sup>

Postel felt great calm and happiness after his translation. Contemporaries little appreciated this because soon he was confined in a monastery functioning as an asylum, which he did not leave till his death. Interestingly, he continued writing throughout the rest of his life and left an enormous amount manuscript material behind; some of his works were even printed during this period.

It is a fact that the Frenchman considered himself the reincarnation of a “lesser Messiah,” “a new Elijah” or a “new Enoch,” a custodian of the female principle. He claimed that he was a reborn and restituted man, a herald of a new era of general *renovatio*. In this age the world would be restored to the perfection of the moment of creation and Satan would be defeated forever before the dawn of the apocalypse.

Although Postel knew about the Ethiopian *Book of Enoch*, he never saw the text. From the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> century this mysterious text vexed theologians, philologists, and enthusiasts. In the seventeenth century there was news of the discovery of 1*Enoch*, but in the end the text turned out to be an original Ethiopian mystical work rather than the long-sought *Book of Enoch*. It was only in 1773 that the real *Apocalypse of Enoch* was found and the text only became available to scholars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Postel’s example shows that although the original text was hidden, even the news about

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 36. Further important literature on Postel: François Secret, *Hermétisme et Kabbale* (Naples: Istituto Italiano, 1992), 119-45; Marion L. Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel. Prophet of the Restitution of All Things* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981); idem, *Venice, Myth and Utopian Thought in the Sixteenth Century. Bodin, Postel and the Virgin of Venice* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> See François Secret, “Alchimie, palingénésie et metempsychose chez Guillaume Postel,” *Chrysopoieia* 3 (1990): 3-62.

<sup>28</sup> Postel relates the story of Mater Zuana’s reincarnation and his own *restitutio* in the following works: *Les très merveilleuses victories des femmes* (Paris: Jehan Gueullart, 1553) and *Le prime novo del altro mondo, cioe, l’admirabile historia..., che stupenda intitulata La Vergine Venetiana* (Venice, 1555).

its existence could kindle the imagination of many enthusiasts. Among the researchers of Enoch in the Renaissance the English mathematician and magus, John Dee, got the farthest.<sup>29</sup>

Dee started as a mathematician but during his career became more and more immersed in occultism. Like many Renaissance intellectuals, he was desperately looking for universal knowledge, a *clavis universalis*, and this turned his attention to esoterism and magic. In 1581 he – like Postel earlier, whom he had actually met in Paris in 1550 – experienced something extraordinary. With the help of a medium, Edward Kelly, he managed to establish regular contact with the spirit world and engaged in conversations with angels. This seemed to him the solution of his long and frustrating search for omniscience after he was disappointed by mathematics and meditative talismanic magic. As he concluded: the easiest way of learning the universal language of Adam and Enoch was to directly ask the angels who had translated the patriarch.<sup>30</sup> The “angelic conversations” took place by the help of the medium, a crystal ball and some magical equipment. It is apparent that the learned humanist and scientist finally ended up practicing a crude form of popular magic known as *scrying*.

The subjects of these angelic conversations were varied, but Dee’s main concern was to learn the *lingua adamica*, about which he took such thorough instruction that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a professional linguist, Donald Laycock, was able to reconstruct its vocabulary and grammar. Perhaps not surprisingly, his conclusion was that the language of the angels has a curious resemblance to English.<sup>31</sup>

Dee meticulously wrote down everything the angels dictated through his medium; this huge amount of manuscript material is called the *spiritual diaries* of Dee, part of which was published by Meric Casaubon, the *Späthumanist* scholar in 1659.<sup>32</sup> From

<sup>29</sup> On Dee see my various articles and three monographs: ‘Exaltatio’ és hatalom. Okkult szimbolizmus egy angol mágus műveiben, Ikonográfia és műértelmezés 7 (Szeged: JATEPress, 1998); *Gli angeli di John Dee* (Rome: Tre Editori, 2004); *John Dee’s Occultism. Magical Exaltation through Powerful Signs*, Series in Western Esoterism (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> See my articles: “The Language of the Other: John Dee’s Experiments with Angelic Conversations,” in *Imaginationen des Anderen im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ina Schabert (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek, 2002), 73–98; “Paracelsus, Scrying and the *Lingua Adamica*: Contexts for John Dee’s Angel Magic,” in *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 207–31; “Talking with Demons. Early Modern Theory and Practice,” in *Christian Demonology and Popular Mythology*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2006), 2: 72–89.

<sup>31</sup> Donald Laycock, *The Complete Enochian Dictionary – as Revealed to John Dee and Edward Kelley* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1994); see Szőnyi, *John Dee’s Occultism*, 210.

<sup>32</sup> Various editions of Dee’s spiritual diaries: *A True and Faithful Relation of What Passed between Dr. John Dee ... and Some Spirits*, ed. Meric Casaubon (London: T. Garthwait, 1659, repr. Glasgow: The Golden Dragon Press / The Antonin Publishing Co., 1974); *Misteriorum libri*, 22 December 1581–23 May 1583, in Christopher Whitby, *John Dee’s Actions with Spirits* (New York: Garland, 1988), 2: 1–408; *The Enochian Magick of Dr. John Dee* [Extracts: “Misteriorum libri”, 1583–1607; “48 claves angelicae”, 1584; “Liber scientia auxilii

the spiritual diaries one can deduce a whole complicated mythological system from revealing the war between the angels and demons, the corruption of mankind by the wicked spirit-prince, Coronzon, and the divine grace extended to Enoch. According to the narrative fiction of Dee, all these pieces of information were delivered by angels, and it is true that the details and motifs of this mythology are not known from any other source.

As it turns out from the diaries, Dee firmly believed that with the help of the angels he became the first privileged man after Enoch to become acquainted with the prelapsarian ur-language, the *lingua adamica*.<sup>33</sup> As I have written about Dee:

The Enochian mythology unfolded in his spiritual diaries through the communication of Archangel Gabriel. On Saturday, April 21, 1584, at a 'scrying session', Gabriel himself revealed the mythical story of the *lingua adamica* to the bemused doctor:

GABRIEL: Man in his Creation, being made an Innocent, was also authorised and made partaker of the Power and Spirit of God: whereby he not only did know all things under his Creation and spoke of them properly, naming them as they were: but also was partaker of our [i.e., the angels'] presence and society, yea a speaker of the mysteries of God; yea, with God himself: so that in innocency the power of his partakers with God, and us his good Angels, was exalted and so became holy in the sight of God until that Coronzon (for so is the true name of that mighty Devil) envying his felicity, began to assail him. . . . And [Man] was driven forth (as your Scriptures record) unto the Earth: where being dumb and not able to speak, he began to learn of necessity the Language in the which he uttered and delivered to his posterity, the nearest knowledge he had of God his Creatures.<sup>34</sup>

The Archangel also assured the pious magus of the goodwill of the spirit world in sharing their knowledge with him:

With this that we deliver, which Adam verily spoke in innocency, and never uttered nor disclosed to man since till now, wherein the power of God must work, and wisdom in her true kind be delivered: which are not to be spoken of in any other thing, neither to be talked of

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& victoriae" 1585], ed. & tr. Geoffrey James (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1994); *Mysteriorum libri, 1581-1583*, in *The John Dee Publication Project*, ed. Clay Holden: <http://www.john-dee.org/>, last access: 2011-01-31.

<sup>33</sup> Casaubon, *A True and Faithful Relation*, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

with mans imaginations; for as this Work and Gift is of God, which is all power, so doth he open it in a tongue of power.<sup>35</sup>

As one can see, from mathematical and magical abstractions Dee finally arrived at a simple and pragmatic program: to learn the angelic language from its users, the angels themselves. As Polonius characterized Hamlet's way of thinking: "though this be madness, yet there is method in't."<sup>36</sup>

The rest of the story now diverges somewhat from occultism as well as from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The search for the perfect or universal language continued, but from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on it followed the principles of rationalism.<sup>37</sup> The quest for Enoch's apocalypse was transferred to the field of philology. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a new interest in Enochian mysticism (see, for example, the "enochian magick" of Aleister Crowley<sup>38</sup> or Béla Hamvas' interest in Enoch mentioned at the beginning of this paper) and some trends of New Age mysticism attached to Enoch still flourish. All this warns us that research into Enoch and his pre-modern cultural representations is still pertinent.

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<sup>35</sup> Szőnyi, *John Dee's Occultism*, 190-1.

<sup>36</sup> *Hamlet*, 2.2.211.

<sup>37</sup> See Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> On Crowley see Charles Richard Cammell, *Aleister Crowley* (London: New English Library, 1969); Roger Hutchinson, *Aleister Crowley: the Beast Demystified* (London: Mainstream, 1998); Serge Hutin, *Aleister Crowley: le plus grand des mages modernes* (Verviers: Gérard, 1973); Francis King, *Magic: the Western Tradition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), 29-31; Colin Wilson, *Aleister Crowley: the Nature of the Beast* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1987).





IMAGES TO INFLUENCE THE SUPERNATURAL:  
APOTROPAIC REPRESENTATIONS ON MEDIEVAL STOVE TILES\*

*Ana Maria Gruia*

Ever since their “invention” in the early fourteenth century, medieval stove tiles have carried various types of representations:

- heraldic ones to show the identity and status of their owner;
- religious ones to match the devotions of the time;
- geometric ones to imitate architecture and delight the eye;
- lay stories to instruct and entertain.

At least, this is the way in which we think they might have been perceived by their medieval beholders. But there are also other representations that do not fit so well into any of these groups and are more ambiguous as to their possible function. These are the hybrids and the monsters, the exotic animals, the sexual or scatological scenes, the masks, the strange signs and symbols. Some can be found also in the margins of manuscripts, on misericords and capitals, on consoles and reliefs, on lay badges and cookie molds. There is an ongoing debate as to the interpretation of these so-called “marginal” representations that permeate various medieval decorative arts. In the absence of written sources, specialists are left to wonder whether they were moral or didactic, subversive or even offensive, humorous or apotropaic, or maybe simply decorative, with no deeper meaning.<sup>1</sup>

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\* I am very grateful to Sophie Page for her useful suggestions on terminology and bibliography related to medieval magic.

<sup>1</sup> Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Le moyen âge fantastique* (Paris: Armand Collin, 1955); Lillian Randall, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Claude Gaignebet and J. Dominique Lajoux, *Art profane et religion populaire au moyen âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985); Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge. The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992); Steen Schjødt Christensen, “Mysterious Images – Grimacing, Grotesque, Obscene, Popular: Anti- or Commentary Images?”, *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 39 (1998): 55-75; Jean Wirth, “Les marges à drôleries des manuscrits gothiques: problèmes de méthode” in *History of Images. Towards a New Iconology*, ed. Alex Bolvig and Phillip Lindley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 277-300; Ruth Mellinkoff, *Avverting Demons. The Protective Power of Medieval Visual Motifs and Themes* (Los Angeles: Ruth Mellinkoff Publications, 2004). A

My assumption is that the “marginal” images on stove tiles, or at least some of them, as well as the religious subjects, had (also) a protective function. They might have been perceived through the paradigms of popular religion (labeled as superstition by the Church, and shared by both elite and lower social groups) and household magic, as one of the effective ways to protect the home and the people inside it.

From a methodological point of view, I have gathered the most “extravagant” examples of stove tile imagery. The selection of the most striking examples, easiest to link to the common tradition of magic, is a methodological short-cut in the sense that larger samples might nuance the interpretation and might lead to the inclusion of other images under the general label of folk apotropaions. One might take into consideration the possible apotropaic function of religious images on stove tiles, but in the absence of strong data supporting such a use, it seems safer to start with the idea easier to grasp. Although “easier” does not mean “easy”, since several precautions must be taken in such an enterprise. First, there is an absence of documentation precisely on the beliefs and uses associated with stove tiles in the late Middle Ages in Central and Eastern Europe. Then, most of the indirect data comes from analogies either distant in time (Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages or Early Modern times) or in space (Western Europe or the Byzantine Empire). Other supporting evidence belongs to learned magic, which could, nevertheless, have shared or lent certain symbols to the common tradition of magic. But studies on the universal character of a belief in apotropaic powers<sup>2</sup> and the slow change of popular culture might, at least tentatively, justify the present attempt to articulate a theory not discussed so far in the scholarly literature.

A brief terminological discussion is needed of the definitions of the key concepts: popular culture, popular religion, and especially, folk magic. Such terms have long been debated in scholarship, and my general impression is that they are best suited to negative definitions by encompassing everything that is *not* official culture, religion, or sophisticated magic.

Aron Gurevich<sup>3</sup> speaks of *medieval popular culture* as a world perception which emerged from the complex and contradictory interaction of the reservoir of traditional folklore and Christianity. Although he deals with an earlier period, namely, that of the sixth to thirteenth centuries, one may take into consideration his observations on the terms of popular Christianity, or parish Christianity, related to magic, not so much as pagan but as typical for any agrarian society. Another related term is popular magic, basically different from popular Christianity in that magic “naturalizes” man, embedding him in the cosmos, while religion “humanizes” the world. The two notions overlap in

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useful overview of the topic is to be found at: <http://www.heyotwell.com/work/arthistory/marginalia.html> (last access: 2011/01/31).

<sup>2</sup> Christa Suttlerin, “Universals in Apotropaic Symbolism. A Behavioral and Comparative Approach to Some Medieval Sculptures,” *Leonardo* 1 (1989): 65-74.

<sup>3</sup> Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture. Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xv.

practice, however, since many Christian rituals have a magical character, while magic includes references to and belief in the saints and religious objects, but uses them as “shortcuts to God’s favors.”<sup>4</sup> Popular magic, labeled by the official church as superstition, that is, false belief, was defined by Robert Scribner<sup>5</sup> as being a form of cultural practice concerned with mastering the exigencies of material and daily life, crossing social boundaries but based on popular, traditional, and oral knowledge. The most thorough discussion on the different meanings and uses of the word “magic” itself and on the way to approach its multiple layers is to be found in Richard Kieckhefer’s seminal writings.<sup>6</sup> Instead of the popular-elite distinction, he introduced a more nuanced and fluid distinction between the “common tradition” and various specialized traditions. The “common tradition of magic” is, in his definition, “not universal, not uniform, but sufficiently diffused that it cannot be assigned to any specific subgroup and expressive more of solidarity than of either hegemony or dissent.”<sup>7</sup> He gives the use of image magic as an example of such widely shared beliefs and practices. Transferred to the specific topic of stove tile imagery, the common tradition shared by various social groups (as indicated by the various social contexts of the finds), might have included the belief in apotropaic images meant to protect the stove, the house, and its inhabitants.

A last introductory word on the basic unit of my analysis: Since exact information on the number of tiles and tile fragments discovered together is usually missing from archaeological publications and reports, the unit employed here is defined as “one or more stove tiles bearing the same representation and coming from the same archaeological context.” When such data is available, it will be mentioned in the text or in the final table.

#### APOTROPAIC PRINCIPLES

The protection offered by images works in several ways. The process implies something (or someone) that needs protection, a harm-causing agent, and an image mediating or ensuring the protection. The inhabitants of the interior space where the stove was located were in need of protection. The evil agent was Satan or demons and they could harm people in ways related to the stove or not. Here one needs to see the importance and powerful symbolism of the hearth and fire, paralleled by its potentially destructive power. Harm could be done to the inhabitants through malfunctions of the stove which might suffocate them with its smoke or might set the entire house on fire.

There is (mostly ethnographic) literature discussing the symbolic charge of certain places and boundaries of interior spaces, such as the threshold, the door, the window and “God’s corner,” the place with the crucifix and devotional pictures/icons.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, 80, 95-6.

<sup>5</sup> Robert W. Scribner, *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400-1800)* (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Idem, “The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic,” *The American Historical Review* 3 (1994): 822.

The liminal and ambiguous characteristics of these spaces often call for protective rituals. As essential element in the geography of the house, with its vital role but also with its potential dangers, could the stove have been perceived as such an item that needed “insurance” against harm?

In order to answer such questions I suggest a threefold approach. Iconographical comparisons with depictions in other artistic milieu (on other functional/domestic material culture objects, but also on badges, charms and amulets, bells, etc.) might indicate which images or visual elements were or still are thought to have protective powers. Contextual data on daily life, popular religious beliefs and domestic magic will help clarify the ways in which such protection functioned and the reasons for which it was needed. Then, the comparison of motifs from different geographical and religious contexts could indicate cultural and religious differences or similarities in image reception and use.

Because it is difficult to argue that a certain image had one and only one function, I will not ignore other possible functions. I refer here to several aspects sometimes mentioned by the existing stove tile literature: the embedded decorative function of such items, the capacity of such images to render symbolic information on the identity, status or the loyalties of the owner, the role of domestic images in visual literacy, as visual aids and means of edification, and last but not least, the indications that religious images on stove tiles can give about the existence of certain cults or devotions in certain geographic areas.<sup>8</sup> The cases analyzed here generally evade these interpretations, however, and that is why I suggest that they make the apotropaic function more visible than other images on tiles might have had in the eyes of their medieval beholders.

What are the basic principles of apotropaic magic? First of all, they are based on the belief in the omnipresence of demons, malefic spirits, the evil eye or witchcraft threatening the wellbeing of people. In the case of domestic magic, the inhabitants seek to protect mostly the liminal spaces, openings such as the threshold, the window, the door, or the chimney flue. Discussing the symbolic charge of certain places and boundaries of interior spaces such as the threshold, the door, the window and “God’s corner,” Robert Scribner<sup>9</sup> makes reference to their liminal and ambiguous characteristics which bring about protective rituals. He does not mention such rituals related to images, however, maybe due to his special interest in the period of the Reformation, which, despite preserving some of the protective rituals, marked a shift of power from sacred images to sacred words and inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> A series of magic rituals are associated with the hearth or the stove, another “sensitive” place of the semantically charged interior space. In

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<sup>8</sup> Ana Maria Gruia, “Royal Sainthood Revisited. New Dimensions of the Cult of St. Ladislav (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries)”, *Colloquia* 1-2 (2005): 23-40, and *Studia Patzinaka* 2 (2006) at: [www.patzinakia.ro](http://www.patzinakia.ro) (last access: 2011/01/31).

<sup>9</sup> Scribner, *Religion and Culture*, 302-22: “Symbolizing Boundaries: Defining Social Space in the Daily Life of Early Modern Germany.”

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, 321-45: “Magic and the Reformed Protestant Popular Culture in Germany.”

early modern Russia, as a measure against witchcraft, certain herbs were burnt in the stove or spells were cast over the chimney and hearth by spreading ash from seven other stoves.<sup>11</sup> In eastern England, the hearth is among the places traditionally protected by charms.<sup>12</sup> On several western European sites, ritual deposits have been discovered around fireplaces and chimneys, consisting of old shoes, dried small animals and different household implements invested with apotropaic powers.<sup>13</sup> In traditional Romanian popular culture (although such practices and beliefs are attested much later, in the modern period), the hearth and the chimney are among the key points of protective rituals and fire, ash and coal are basic elements in traditional domestic magic.<sup>14</sup> Another clue for the traditional need to protect the fire place is to be found in the use of hearth icons in the Orthodox milieu.

One can presume that the tile stove also figured among the areas of interior space attracting protection due to the dangers it represents. Stoves were dangerous objects that could set the entire house on fire (especially in the case of medieval buildings made of wood) or could suffocate the inhabitants with smoke. Malfunctioning of the stove would therefore have been prevented by all means, the apotropaic one suiting the medieval mentality.

The act of seeing is essential in the protective function, the gaze which activates the power of the image. The representations on tiles are meant either to be seen by the inhabitants or by the demons. According to general beliefs of popular religion, religious images sometimes work simply by being looked at. The classical example is that of St. Christopher, who protects the viewer from sudden death during that day. Another theory holds that some images are meant to protect by distracting the demons, confusing them, fooling or frightening them. In her analysis of marginal images with a presumed apotropaic function, Ruth Melinkoff mentions several means of making such a protection effective. She suggests that these images were not to be seen by people but by demons, who were presumably repelled by representations of themselves, distracted by ambiguous, strange or curious representations, or scared by religious, violent, ugly, sexual or scatological displays.<sup>15</sup> At the sight of the cross for example, the demons know that the object, person or space marked by it stands under divine protection and they flee in terror. Another principle she mentions is the accumulation of symbols from different systems of belief, meant to grant more efficient protection. Such a principle certainly fits the case of stove tiles, where elements from official religion (crosses, saints)

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<sup>11</sup> William F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight. Magic in Russia* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 43.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1987), 167.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, 128.

<sup>14</sup> Ivan Eseev, *Dicționar de magie, demonologie și mitologie românească* (Dictionary of Romanian Magic, Demonology and Mythology) (Timișoara: Amarcord, 1998), s. v. "cărbune" (coal), "cenușa" (ash), "foc" (fire), "horn" (chimney), "vatra" (hearth).

<sup>15</sup> Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons*, 45-51.

feature besides geometric magical symbols, monsters and hybrids, masks and amulet hands.

Although Henry Maguire<sup>16</sup> analyses the use of images in the context of household magic in a different context, that of early Byzantium, one can try to apply some of his conclusions. The main characteristic of the images used for apotropaic ends is, according to his study, their obscurity and their repetition. Making the parallel with the stove tiles, one notices that these characteristics are preserved: in the great majority of cases one decorative motif is repeated several times on the same stove and through repeated copying (and maybe lack of talent) the accuracy of the details is lost to such a degree that some motifs may lose all recognizable elements.<sup>17</sup>

#### THE TILES

The images on stove tiles selected for supporting my hypothesis are very different. Some are graphic symbols, such as the pentagram, knots and interlaces, some pertain to the wider category of monsters like the two-tailed siren, and some combine image and text, like the orant angel with prayer, or religious and “magical” devices, such as the combination of crosses with masks or hands. Some of these motifs were popular in the decoration of stove tiles in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (the two-tailed siren was very “fashionable”); others were rare or even unique (the orant angel). I will start with the latter, referring in each case to analogies in other arts and discussing arguments for and against an apotropaic interpretation of their use on stove tiles

#### *The pentagram*

The pentagram, or the *pentalpha* (called by the ancient Greeks “five times A,” the five-pointed star drawn continuously with one movement of the hand, resembling an interlace or a knot), appears depicted on two Transylvanian tiles, from the castle of Lăzarea (fig. 1)<sup>18</sup> and a casual find in Sebeș (fig. 2),<sup>19</sup> and on one tile from the princely

<sup>16</sup> Henry Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies. Saints and their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 118-32: “The Saints and Household Magic.”

<sup>17</sup> The same traits can have also more “pragmatic” causes, such as the availability of series of the same motif rather than of different motifs and the fading of details due to pure technological reasons (the wearing out of the mold, too much glaze filling up the relief, etc.).

<sup>18</sup> Mónika Kémenes, *Kályhacsempék Csik-, Gyergyó- és Kászonszékből 14.-18. század* (Stove tiles from the Ciuc, Gheorgheni and Cașin regions, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century) (Kolozsvár: Entz Géza Foundation for Cultural History, 2005), 149, plate 38.1.

<sup>19</sup> Daniela Marcu Istrate, *Căle din Transilvania și Banat de la începuturi până la 1700* (Stove tiles from Transylvania and Banat, from the beginnings to 1700) (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2004), 266, 471, fig. B5.

court in Bacău, Moldavia (fig. 3).<sup>20</sup> They have analogies on tiles from Ormož (Slovenia, fig. 4),<sup>21</sup> Kľaštorskó (Slovakia, fig. 5),<sup>22</sup> and Willisau/Hasenburg (Switzerland).<sup>23</sup> The earliest seems to be the Swiss tile, dating back to the second half of the fourteenth century. Most of them come from the second half of the fifteenth century, while the latest are the Transylvanian tiles, from the sixteenth century. One may note from the start that pentagrams rarely occur in stove tile iconography, all in all on just six tiles in my research. Nevertheless, the motif has a long tradition in learned magic and was transmitted down into the common tradition. Could this be the context in which the pentagrams were used on stove tiles?

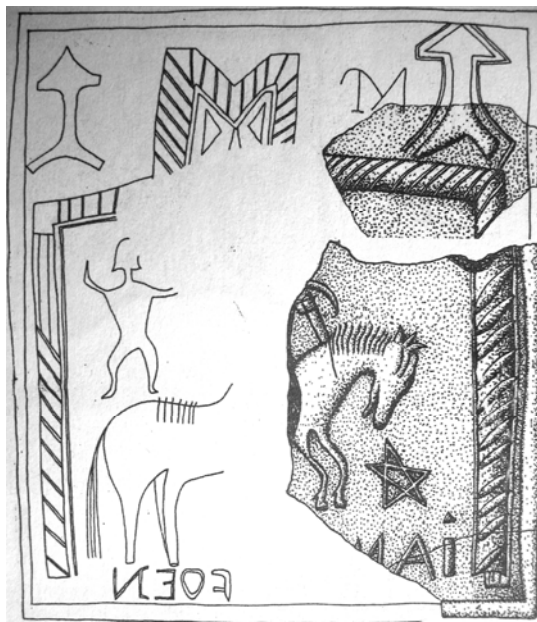


Fig. 1: Pentagram. Lăzarea, castle, 16<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>20</sup> Alexandru Artimon, "Date istorice și arheologice cu privire la curtea domnească din Bacău" (Historical and archaeological data on the princely court in Bacău), *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor Istorice. Materiale de Istoria Artei* 2 (1987): 11, fig. 12.4.

<sup>21</sup> Analogies are mentioned at Planina pri Sevnici and Slovenske Konice: Marjana Tomanič-Jeremov, "Ormož," in *Drobtci Nekega Vsakdana*, *Archaeologia Historica Slovenica* 2 (Ljubljana: Fil. Fak., Oddelek za Arheologijo, 1997), 119, fig. 4.80, 122, 132.

<sup>22</sup> Unpublished, information from Michal Slivka and Martin Homza.

<sup>23</sup> Jürg Tauber, *Herd und Ofen im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur Kulturgeschichte am archäologischen Material vornehmlich der Nordwestschweiz (9.-14. Jahrhundert)*, *Schweizer Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Archäologie des Mittelalters* 7 (Olten and Freiburg: Walter-Verlag, 1980), 209, fig. 37. No analogies, kept in the Schweizerischen Landesmuseum, Zurich.

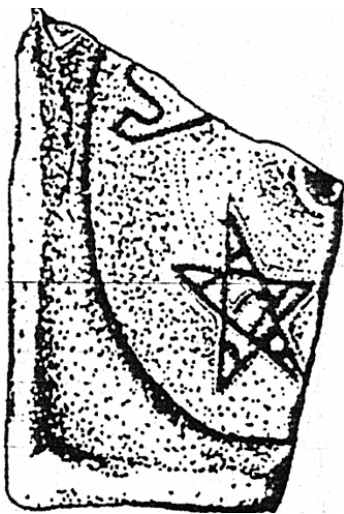


Fig. 2: Pentagram. Sebeș, casual find, 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century

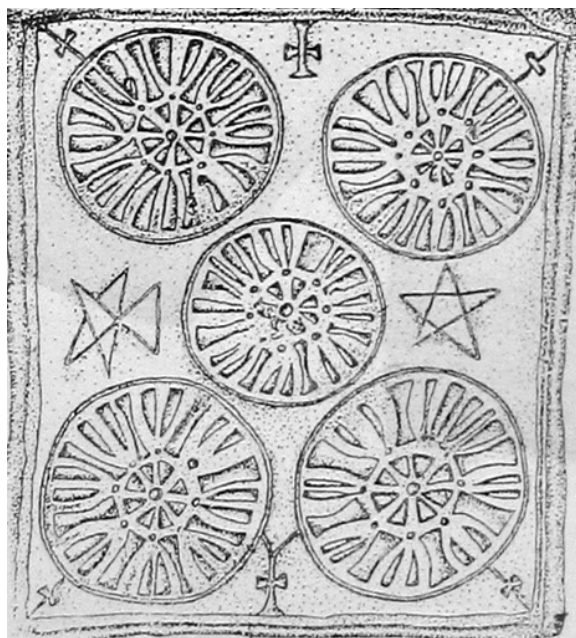


Fig. 3: Pentagram. Bacău, princely court, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century





Fig. 4: Pentagram. Ormož, dwelling, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century



Fig. 5: Pentagram. Klačtorisko, Carthusian monastery, 1478-1530

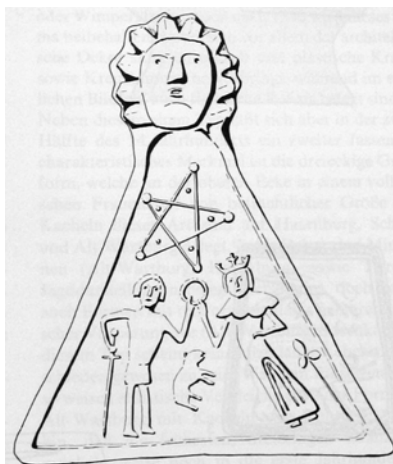


Fig. 6: Pentagram. Willisau/Hasenburg, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century

The pentagram appeared in ancient Greek and Hellenistic times, having an apotropaic function in the kabbalistic tradition. It was used by Byzantine armies as a sign of salvation on their flags.<sup>24</sup> In lay iconography it could also be a symbol of medicine (identified as *hygieia*), but this does not exclude a magical function, that of conferring the power over death on the doctor's pill, as on Late Antique doctor stamps.<sup>25</sup> Its main magic power, however, comes from the fact that it was the device of the legendary Solomonic seal, engraved on the signet ring given to King Solomon by God so that he might seal and thereby control the power of demons. It was one of the most powerful amulet signs in the Late Antique and Byzantine lexicon of magic, employed in the decoration of rings, armbands,<sup>26</sup> pendants, and on all types of amulets generally.<sup>27</sup> During the Middle Ages, the pentagram was used more frequently in learned magic, in the composition of magic circles inscribed with the names of the conjured spirits drawn in necromancers' books or on seals for planets and days of the week.<sup>28</sup> It also figures in ritual diagrams for protection.<sup>29</sup> Other fifteenth-century examples of pentagrams come

<sup>24</sup> *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum, vol. 3 (Vienna: Herder, 1994), s.v. "Pentagramm".

<sup>25</sup> Gary Vikan, *Sacred Images and Sacred Power in Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 69, 70, fig. 4, fig. 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, fig. 9, fig. 10a, 10d, 10h.

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Spier, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 25-62, cat. 33, 34, 49; James Russell, "The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 35-50.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites. A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997): circles: 353, fol. 15v, no. 6; 357, fol. 26r, no. 10; 364, fol. 42r, no. 22; 365, fol. 42v, no. 23; seals: 370, fol. 73v, no. 37c; 371, fol. 74r, no. 37c; 372, fol. 74v, no. 37c.

<sup>29</sup> Sophie Page, *Magic in Medieval Manuscripts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), fig. 34.

from pentacles (amulets used in magical evocation on which the symbol of a spirit or energy being evoked is drawn) illustrated in other magic manuscripts, like the treatise known as *The Magic Treatise of Solomon*.<sup>30</sup> Still, there are some examples of pentagrams used on more popular levels. A sixteenth-century amulet ring is decorated with a serpent biting its tail (the *ouroboros*), and a pentagram with the letters for SALUS.<sup>31</sup> Other fifteenth-century finger rings display the pentagram as a protective device.<sup>32</sup> As symbol of Christ's Five Wounds, it appears rather late, in the interpretation of Cornelius à Lapide (1567-1637),<sup>33</sup> and it was always a lesser Christian symbol.

The pentagrams on tiles appear in very different types of compositions and are rather difficult to interpret. On the tile from Bacău, the pentagram and another star-like pattern flank one of five rosettes. On the borders there are six smaller crosses. The combination of crosses, solar rosettes, the pentagram and the geometric pattern might indicate an apotropaic function created by the juxtaposition of religious and non-religious symbols. The tile from Sebeș is preserved fragmentarily; the existing part shows a pentagram with lines on each end of the points, inscribed beside other elements in a medallion. Interestingly, on this tile the pentagram is not molded but incised, therefore not part of the pattern but a later intervention, maybe restricted to only this one tile. The tile from Lăzarea, reconstructed as it is, displays the pentagram positioned in front of a rider. On the left side there is also a stylized standing character. A border ending in an architectonic M-shape surrounds the composition. On the upper corners there are two arrows pointing upward, and another letter M. In the foreground one can read (in the mirror) a name: IANOS FEON, presumably that of the potter. It might be that in this case the pentagram is a master's mark, like that some stonemasons used at Pilis, in Hungary.<sup>34</sup> On stove tiles, masters usually wrote their names or their initials on the surface of the objects they produced without any supplementary identification signs, which were probably not needed. At Ormož, one large pentagram stands at the feet of a dragon with a knotted tail and another, smaller, is in the diagonally opposite corner. The

<sup>30</sup> British Library, Harleian MS. 5596 (15<sup>th</sup> c.) at: <http://www.esotericarchives.com/esoteric.htm> (last access: 2011/01/31).

<sup>31</sup> Ormonde M. Dalton, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings. Early Christian, Byzantine, Teutonic, Medieval, and Later, Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1912), cat. 891.

<sup>32</sup> E. Guilhou, *Catalogue of the Superb Collection of Rings formed by the late Monsieur E. Guilhou of Paris* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1937), cat. 632, 636, 637.

<sup>33</sup> *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 3, s.v. "Pentagramm."

<sup>34</sup> Imre Holl, *Die Ausgrabungen in Pilisszentkereszt 1: Funde aus dem Zisterzienserkloster von Pilis* (Budapest: MTA Régészeti Intézet, 2000). Some studies have suggested that such marks could be simply job-specific, meant to ease assembling, and not carrying any further information. But in the case of stove tiles, it seems more probable that even if such signs existed (they are never mentioned in the relevant literature), they would have been placed on the reverse of the tiles. For other pentagrams as signs in the Middle Ages see: Jennifer S. Alexander, "Villard de Honnecourt and Masons' Marks" in *Villard's Legacy. Studies in Medieval Technology, Science and Art in Memory of Jean Gimpel*, ed. Marie-Therese Zenner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 53-69.

dragon is usually an incarnation of the devil (like the one slain by St. George), so the fact that it is framed by two symbols reputed for their power to control demons (as Solomon reportedly did with his signet ring inscribed with the pentagram) could indicate symbolic control over evil. The tile from Kľaštorisko is also easy to interpret in a magic context, related to learned magic since documents identify an abbot of this Carthusian monastery who had an interest in alchemy. Other tiles found at the site, unfortunately not yet catalogued, include several interesting lay representations besides religious ones, like the wild man fighting a crab, or even (presumably) an alchemist working with his instruments and his muse/assistant/angel.<sup>35</sup> Alchemical representations on stove tiles are also known from German-speaking areas.<sup>36</sup> The tiles, dated to the sixteenth century, were discovered in an alchemical laboratory in the castle in Oberstockstall (today's Austria). They are highly symbolic, depicting an opened door with different symbols decorating the portal, and a fragment with a male head flanked by a humanized sun and the moon. Iconographically they belong to the Renaissance style, but they show that alchemical imagery was also applied to the medium of stove tiles.

On the tile from Kľaštorisko the pentagram stands besides other symbols that can be interpreted as magic (a three-lobed interlace, and a four-lobed interlace inscribed in a circle, sometimes called Solomon's knot<sup>37</sup>). All these non-religious symbols, placed under a gothic arch with architectural tracery, are surmounted by a large cross. It is interesting to note that through its superposed position the cross dominates the other signs. Bearing in mind that such tiles were used in the composition of stoves in the *cellas* of a Carthusian monastery, it seems only natural that the cross should dominate all other representations.

The tile from Willisau/Hasenburg depicts the pentagram with dots on its five points, placed above a couple holding a chaplet. The crowned woman stands beside a flower and the man holds a sword. Besides these gender attributes, there is also a lap dog that seems to jump under the chaplet between them, pointing maybe towards the erotic connotations of the image. The pentagram in this case might be interpreted in the context of erotic magic or the protection of a married couple.

Another aspect to take into consideration is the social context of discovery and use of the tiles. They come from upper social contexts (a princely court, a castle) to, most interestingly, a monastery (Kľaštorisko), down to lower contexts such as a dwelling

<sup>35</sup> Unpublished; information from Michal Slivka.

<sup>36</sup> Sigrid von Osten, *Das Alchemistenlaboratorium Oberstockstall. Ein Fundkomplex des 16. Jahrhunderts aus Niederösterreich* (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1998), 61-2, 66, fig. 38, table 42, fig. N1, fig. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Maguire, *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 265-8: "Magic and Geometry in Early Christian Floor Mosaics and Textiles." The medieval name of the pattern was also 'Emblem of the Divine Inscrutability,' presumably all the wisdom of Solomon was hidden in this knot. Due to the design, it is associated with the passage from One to Two. At the same time it unites the knot, the cross, and the swastika. It appears in several media, on mosaics, church tympanums, reliquaries, etc. See: Umberto Sansoni, *Il nodo di Salomone. Simbolo e archetipo d'alleanza* (Milan: Electra, 1998); Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons*, 85, 161-3.

(Ormož). It seems therefore that these pentagrams cannot be linked to any particular context of use, and should be analyzed in the framework of the common tradition of imagery, culture, and magic.

### *The orant figure*

A tile fragment from Transylvania, dated back to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, depicts a character with both arms raised, standing beside a large cross with floral elements. The item probably comes from the fortification of Mălăiești (Hunedoara County, fig. 7).<sup>38</sup> It has been interpreted as depicting St. Constantine or St. Helen, but the absence of saintly elements, the very schematic character of the depictions (which make the human look like he/she has feelers on his/her head), and the flowers springing from the cross, do not seem to sustain such an interpretation. It could therefore be just a generic gesture of prayer, invoking protection.

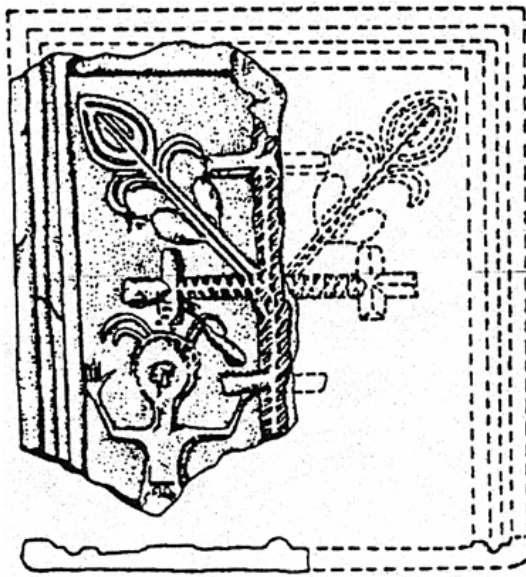


Fig. 7: Orant figure. Mălăiești, fortification, 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century

The gesture of two raised arms has been associated with divine power and protection almost universally, from ancient Egypt, the Minoan civilization, and ancient

<sup>38</sup> It appears twice in publications, in one case as if it were discovered in Mălăiești and the other as probably coming from Sălașul de Sus, but is obviously the same fragment: Marcu-Istrate, *Căhle din Transilvania*, 242, 529, fig. 9 and 236, 428, fig. C1; Adrian Andrei Rusu, "Căhle din Transilvania" II (Stove Tiles from Transylvania II), *Arheologia Medievală* 1 (1996): 134, 135, 153, fig. 18.

Greece. It was then taken over in Christian iconography, where figures in front view with arms raised at shoulder height were called orants (*orans*). They become personifications of piety and pious supplication. For the early Christians, the appeal of the gesture depended perhaps on its analogy to the figure of the crucified Christ.<sup>39</sup> During the rest of the Middle Ages the most popular orant, especially in the Byzantine sphere and the area influenced by it, such as Italy, was the Virgin, depicted with raised arms (an iconographical type called *Deomene*).<sup>40</sup>

Another tile that one could bring into this discussion is one depicting an orant angel surrounded by an inscription (written in mirror-image letters) that reads: AVE GRATIA PLENA D(OMINI). Eight green glazed fragments from at least six different individual stove tiles decorated with the same motif were found at Pomáz, the noble residence of the Cyko family. The original location of the stove or other representations on it are unknown, since the tiles come from a secondary context – a refuse pit. They certainly date to the end of the fourteenth century and different molds were probably used since the images vary slightly from fragment to fragment.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike stove tiles depicting the Annunciation,<sup>42</sup> the tile from Pomáz is unique in the depiction of the inscription and the orant position of the angel (fig. 8). Also, no paired tile representing the Virgin receiving the news has been uncovered on the site. This indicates that the image might have been used in order to protect and repel evil by invoking the Virgin. Prayers written down and used to this end were frequent in medieval amulets.<sup>43</sup> The Ave Maria, one of the basic medieval prayers, has long been endowed with apotropaic associations. The Golden Legend recorded (and made popular) a series of tales of protection and cure granted by the recitations of the Marian salutation.<sup>44</sup> A

<sup>39</sup> Dimitri Hazzikostas, "Arms Raised," in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography. Themes depicted in Works of Art*, ed. Helene E. Roberts (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), vol. I, 51–8.

<sup>40</sup> Angela Donati and Giovanni Gentili (ed.), *Deomene. L'immagine dell'orante fra Oriente e Occidente* (Milano: Electra, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Gábor Virágos, *A Pomáz klissza dombi középkori nemesi rezidencia, templom és temető eddigi feltárásainak összefoglaló elemzése* (Summary of the excavation from the medieval noble residence, church, and cemetery of Pomáz, at the Klissza Dombi) (Budapest, 1997), 38, fig. 118.

<sup>42</sup> Mold kept in Prievidza (Northern Hungary), one tile created with that mold in Bohemia, in the castle on Vsetínský Peak, one tile in Bistrița (Transylvania); the scene on two tiles in Buda palace, others in Ružica castle (Croatia), and in Nova Ves (Croatia). Prievidza: Beata Egyház-Jurovská, *Stredoveké kachlice. Katalóg* (Medieval stove tiles. Catalogue) (Bratislava: Slovenské Národné Múzeum, 1993), cat. 121, fig. 21; Bistrița: Marcu Istrate, *Căble din Transilvania*, 180, 347; Buda: Judit Tamási, *Vermählte Typen im schweizerischen und ungarischen Kachelfundmaterial in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Budapest: Országos Műemlékvédelmi Hivatal, 1995), 135, fig. 94, 104; Ružica: Mladen Radić and Zvonko Bojčić, *Srednjovjekovni Grad Ružica* (The medieval castle of Ružica) (Listopad: Muzej Slavonije, 2004), 300, cat. 626; Nova Ves: Boris Mašić, *Kasnogotički pećnjaci s Nove Vesi* (Late Gothic stove tiles from Nova Ves) (Zagreb: Muzej Grada Zagreba, 2002), cat. 12, 38, 39.

<sup>43</sup> Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words. Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2006.)

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, 275, note 83.

fourteenth-century amulet ring from England bears the inscription AVE MARIA GRATIA PLE, besides the often-used magic word AGLA (Holy).<sup>45</sup> Other finger rings, bearing variants of the salutation, also display quatrefoils, lions' mouths, and monster heads.<sup>46</sup> Numerous cases of the use of prayers in amulets, texts from the lives of the saints or the holy book written down on strips of parchment or paper (so-called phylacteries) indicate that there was indeed a wide-spread belief in the protective power of religious texts.<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 8: Orant figure. Pomáz, noble residence, end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>45</sup> Dalton, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings*, cat. 869. For a good article on the relation between devotion and text amulets see Edina Bozóky, "From Matter of Devotion to Amulets", *Medieval Folklore* 3 (1994): 91-107.

<sup>46</sup> Guilhou, *Catalogue*, cat. 640-3.

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Claude Poulin, "Entre magie et religion. Recherches sur les utilisations marginales de l'écrit dans la culture populaire du haut Moyen Age," in *La Culture Populaire au Moyen Age*, ed. Pierre Boglioni (Montreal: L'Aurore, 1979), 122-43.

*The open hand, masks, birds, and crosses*

To the best of my knowledge, only two tiles are decorated with this motif, one kept in Budapest at the Museum of Applied Arts (fig. 9),<sup>48</sup> and the other in Bucharest<sup>49</sup> at the Romanian Peasant Museum (fig. 10). They have not been related in previous scholarship. Two birds, head-to-head, flank a central column with a capital decorated with the depiction of a hand. Beside the column two human masks support geometric arches, suggesting that they functioned as vault stones. On the upper side of the tile, on top of each arch, stand three crosses with dots beside their stems; two of them have vegetal elements.



Fig. 9: Open hand, masks, birds, and crosses. Hungary, 16<sup>th</sup> century  
(kept in Budapest, Museum of Applied Arts)

<sup>48</sup> Taken from the on-line database of the Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (<http://www.imareal.oew.ac.at/realonline/>), no. 013720 (last access: 2011/01/31).

<sup>49</sup> Georgeta Roșu and Ion Brăjanu, *Cable* (Stove Tiles) (Bucharest: Muzeul Țăranului Român, 2001), 60, C1843.





Fig. 10: Open hand, masks, birds, and crosses. Transylvania, 16<sup>th</sup> century  
(kept in Bucharest, Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

The sixteenth-century tile in Budapest seems to have been the model for the one kept in Bucharest (discovered somewhere in Transylvania) whose decoration is shallower in relief, with fewer details, and unglazed. It also features an added border of dots, typical of copies which had to be enlarged by such additions in order to have the same dimensions as the original (considering that clay shrinks about 10% during drying and firing). Even if the Transylvanian tile is later, I find it hard to believe that it is two centuries later. Rather its uncertain dating should be rectified from the eighteenth to the sixteenth century.

In support of an apotropaic function of such an image one can bring into discussion the use of open hands as amulets in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the presumed apotropaic function of masks, and the combination of these symbols with crosses. The alchemical drawing of a hand showing the planetary forces became known as the Hand of Fortune or the Hand of St. John and was worn to encourage happy fate and good opportunities. In Christian culture, the hand is also associated with blessing, and the power conferred on it by this gesture led to numerous hand relics and hand-

shaped reliquaries.<sup>50</sup> Different gestures of the hand have been used (and some still are) as amulets: the fist with the forefinger and small fingers out, like horns, the thumb between the forefinger and index (*mano fica*). The open hand is more an apotropaion in Islam, being known as the Hand of Fatima, and also in Judaism, related to the magic of the number five.<sup>51</sup> In fifteenth-century Christian popular imagery, on the other hand, the open hand was presented as *speculum humanae salvationis*, as a memory aid and advertisement for confession, the extended fingers symbolizing divine law, examination of conscience, repentance, confession, and penitence, respectively. The image was frequently reproduced in German prints in the fifteenth century, and then was taken up during the Counter-reformation as instrument in catechism, and also in pilgrimage.<sup>52</sup> Masks have been also labeled as apotropaic.<sup>53</sup> A sixteenth-century Italian amulet ring, for example, was decorated with a mask and a magic inscription.<sup>54</sup>

It could be that this rare image on tiles, combining several elements liable to an apotropaic interpretation and surmounted by crosses, could have been used for protection. The existence of two directly related tiles suggests that the motif was popular enough for at least two series to have been created in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary.

### *The two-tailed siren*

Unlike the previous examples, the image of the two-tailed siren was very popular on stove tiles in the late Middle Ages and it allows for a more detailed analysis. 77 tiles with this motif have been discovered (counting also the identical ones found in the same site, the number goes up to one hundred), from the German areas, Bohemia, Hungary, and Moldavia.<sup>55</sup> One must note, though, that the image has not yet been discovered on tiles from Wallachia, which can be taken to confirm that the influence of Central European stove tile iconography was weaker there. In the other areas the siren was popular enough to be copied and re-copied, and although directly related tiles are to be found only inside the same medieval province, sometimes they traveled significant distances, up to around 300 km. Most of these images decorate flat stove tiles, a few are to be found on crown tiles and one on a base tile. Chronologically they all belong to the

<sup>50</sup> Cynthia Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries," *Gesta* 1 (1997): 20-31.

<sup>51</sup> Liselotte Hansmann and Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck, *Amulett und Talisman* (Munich: Callwey, 1966), 192-207; Siegfried Seligmann, *Die magischen Heil- und Schutzmittel aus der belebten Natur*, vol. II: *Das Tierreich* (Berlin: Reimer, 1999), 153-5.

<sup>52</sup> Wolfgang Brückner, *Imagerie populaire allemande* (Milan: Electra, 1969), 19, fig. 25.

<sup>53</sup> Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons*, 103-9; Hansmann and Kriss-Rettenbeck, *Amulett*, 184-91 (in different cultures).

<sup>54</sup> Dalton, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings*, cat. 892.

<sup>55</sup> Ana Maria Gruia, "Sirena bicaudată pe cahle medievale. Iconografie și posibile funcții" (The two-tailed siren on medieval stove tiles. Iconography and possible functions), *Arheologia medievală* 6 (2007): 205-41, and *Studia Patzinaka* 4 (2007).

period from the end of the fourteenth until the beginning of the sixteenth century. As for their distribution, the tiles have been discovered mostly in Bohemia and Moravia (49), but also in the Kingdom of Hungary (14; 5 in Transylvania, 6 in Central Hungary, 3 in Northern Hungary [present-day Slovakia], and none in Slavonia) and in Moldavia (7).<sup>56</sup> Seven tiles were discovered in the former territories of the Holy German Empire.

The oldest seem to be those from Basel, from the second half of the fourteenth century. The tiles from Hungary, from around Buda and from Oradea, are dated towards the end of the same century. In Bohemia and Moravia most of the tiles from this group date to the second half of the fifteenth century, while in Moldavia most are from the end of that century. The latest seem to be the Transylvanian tiles, dated more generally to the fifteenth/sixteenth century (although some authors tend to restrict the period, considering the items no later than the beginning of the sixteenth century).<sup>57</sup> Presuming that the archaeologists' dating is correct, it seems that the first tiles decorated with sirens were produced between 1350 and 1400 in and around Basel and Buda. It also seems probable that Basel introduced the motif and then it was rapidly taken over and made popular by the royal workshops from Hungary. The time of great popularity of the siren on tiles was the second half of the fifteenth century, mostly in the Czech areas, but also in Moldavia, Transylvania, Northern Hungary, and the German lands. Afterwards the motif lost ground, the last examples coming from the Szekler areas of Transylvania from the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The archaeological contexts show that these representations were part of varied types of interiors: royal palaces, princely courts, princely and noble residences, castles, fortifications, city halls, urban and burgher houses, even a ceramic workshop. In the rare cases when the general iconography of the stoves can be reconstructed, sirens feature beside mixed religious and lay representations (as is the case of Suceava and Banská Bystrica). Banská Bystrica was one of the most important centers of tile production in medieval Hungary. Here the siren was part of stoves with similar iconography from the urban house of the mayor, who ordered them, and the town hall. Sirens stood beside religious images (St. George, St. Ladislav, St. Catherine, Agnus Dei),

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<sup>56</sup> I rejected as improbable two tile fragments from Arbore [Paraschiva Victoria Batariuc, *Căle din Moldova (secolele XIV-XVII)* (Stove tiles from Moldavia, 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c.) (Suceava: Istros, 1999), 107; Petre Oprea, "Urme ceramice de la casele hatmanului Luca Arbore" (Ceramic Finds from the Residence of Hatman Luca Arbore), *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei* 1965: 329 and 330] and Suceava [Batariuc, *Căle din Moldova*, 179; Monica Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu and Radu Popa, *Mărturie de civilizație medievală românească. O casă a domniei și o sobă monumentală de la Suceava din vremea lui Ștefan cel Mare* (Testimonies of medieval Romanian civilisation. A princely house and a monumental stove from Suceava, from the times of Stephen the Great) (Bucharest: Ed. Acad. R. S. România, 1979), 68, fig. 49].

<sup>57</sup> Adrian Andrei Rusu, "Căle din Transilvania III. Trei motive decorative medievale" (Stove tiles from Transylvania III. Three medieval decorative motifs), *Acta Musei Napocensis* 39/40 (2002/2003): 110.

animals (lions), geometric motifs, lay fables (the wolf preaching to the geese), and a mysterious and unique sexual scene.<sup>58</sup>



Fig. 11. Two-tailed siren. Buda, royal palace, second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century



Fig. 12: Two-tailed siren. Budafelhévíz, suburb of Buda, end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>58</sup> On the latter see: Ana Maria Gruia, "Sex on the Stove. A Fifteenth-Century Tile from Banská Bystrica," *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 55 (2007): 19-58, and *Studia Patzinaka* 4 (2007).



Fig. 13: Two-tailed siren. Sâncrăieni, curia, 15<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century

Analyzing the geographic distribution of these tiles, one notes that the groups of directly related tiles<sup>59</sup> come from relatively restricted areas. Stove tiles decorated with identical sirens have been discovered in different parts of the city of Basel.<sup>60</sup> Another group is composed of tiles found in and around Buda [Buda (fig. 11),<sup>61</sup> Nyék<sup>62</sup> and Budafelhévíz (fig. 12)<sup>63</sup>]. They come from royal contexts such as the palace of Buda and a residence in Nyék, while the exact find context of the tiles from the suburb of Buda-

<sup>59</sup> Created with the same mould, copies of each other or imitations of other tiles, according to the definition given by Judit Tamási. See Tamási, *Verwandte Typen*, 15-6.

<sup>60</sup> See Tauber, *Herd und Ofen im Mittelalter*, 146, 147, fig. 106.6, 328, table 18.5, fig. 238.

<sup>61</sup> Holl, "Középkori kályhacsempék," 243, 244, fig. 56; Holl, "Spätgotische Ofenkacheln," *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 50 (1998): 183, fig. 42.

<sup>62</sup> Imre Holl and Pál Voit, *Alte ungarische Ofenkacheln* (Budapest: Corvina, 1963), 65, cat. 13, fig. 13; Konrad Strauss, *Die Kachelkunst des 15. bis 17. Jahrhunderts in europäischen Ländern*, vol. III (Munich: Heydenreich, 1983), table 19, fig. 2; Peter Havassy (ed.), *Gerensék, kályházók, tűzvizigázók. Fendáliskori kályhacsempék az Alföldről és peremvidékéről* (Potters and tile masters. Medieval and early modern stove tiles from the area of the Hungarian plane) (Gyula, 2000), 114, cat. 229.

<sup>63</sup> Edith Kocsis, "Ásatás a tölgyfa utca 24-ben" (Rescue Excavation at 24 Tölgyfa Street), *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 33 (1999): 356, fig. 4.1.

felhévíz is not known. Two tiles from Buda<sup>64</sup> and Oradea<sup>65</sup> are also directly related, depicting the siren with male facial traits and a crab underneath. This group illustrates the farthest distance “traveled” by the motif of the two-tailed siren on stove tiles, at least at the present state of research. One can see how the model was transmitted from a royal context, the palace in Buda, to an aristocratic and military one such as the fortification in Oradea. Another group of related tiles is to be found in the Szekler region of Transylvania, at Cristur,<sup>66</sup> Sâncrăieni (fig. 13),<sup>67</sup> and Mihăileni,<sup>68</sup> in noble (the curia owned by the Andrassy family) and pre-urban contexts (the market-town of Cristur).



Fig. 14: Two-tailed siren. Banská Bystrica, urban house, middle of the fifteenth century

<sup>64</sup> Holl, “Középkori kályhacsempék Magyarországon” (Medieval Stove Tiles from Hungary) I, *Budapest Régiségei* 18 (1958): 225, 227, fig. 27; Károly Magyar, “Ofenkacheln aus dem Budaer Königspalast,” in *Budapest im Mittelalter*, ed. Gerd Biegel (Braunschweig: Braunschweigisches Landesmuseum, 1991), 275, cat. 403.

<sup>65</sup> Rusu, “Cahle din Transilvania III,” 2002/03.

<sup>66</sup> Elek Benkő, *A középkori Keresztúr-széke régészeti topográfiája* (Archaeological Topography of the medieval seat of Cristur) (Budapest: Publ. Inst. Archaeologici, 1992), 162, fig. 70.2; Elek Benkő et al., *Középkori mezőváros a Székelyföldön* (Medieval market towns from the Szekler lands) (Kolozsvár, 1997), plate 42; Marcu Istrate, *Cahle din Transilvania și Banat*, 90, 208.

<sup>67</sup> Kémenes, *Kályhacsempék Csik-, Gyergő- és Kászonszékéből* 110, cat. 3, plate 8, fig. 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Repertoriul arheologic al județului Harghita* (Archaeological repertory of the Harghita County) (Sf. Gheorghe: Ed. Carpații Răsăriteni, 2000), 393, pl. 57/13.



Fig. 15: Two-tailed sire. Suceava, princely fortification, 15<sup>th</sup> century



Fig. 16: Two-tailed sire. Prague, 15<sup>th</sup> century

In Banská Bystrica, identical tiles have been discovered in two different contexts, parts of stoves heating the interiors of the city hall and the house of the mayor

(fig. 14).<sup>69</sup> In Moldavia, related tiles came from several locations in Suceava [the princely fortification (fig. 15),<sup>70</sup> the princely house,<sup>71</sup> and an urban dwelling<sup>72</sup>] and Iași (an urban house).<sup>73</sup> One may speak of a socially vertical transmission of the motif, from princely down to urban circles. Other groups of directly related tiles have been found in the Czech lands, fragments from similar tiles originating from the area of Prague (fig. 16).<sup>74</sup> Another group of crown tiles come from Prague<sup>75</sup> and the nearby fortifications of Nezhvizdky<sup>76</sup> and Kokorin.<sup>77</sup> It is probable that this group was produced in urban workshops and then bought and used to heat and decorate the interiors of the fortification and the castle nearby. A similar situation is suggested by tiles and tile fragments from different places in Prague that have close analogies in Mukařov u Ričan,<sup>78</sup> Lichnice (fig. 17)<sup>79</sup> and Jindřichův Hradec.<sup>80</sup> Another group consists of the remains of at least six tiles created in two variants, with and without a heraldic shield in the back-

<sup>69</sup> Marta Mácelová, "Gotické kachlové pece z banskobystrické radnice" (Gothic tiled stoves from the city hall of Banská Bystrica), *Archaeologia historica* 24 (1999): 417, fig. 8.8, 420; *Banská Bystrica a Stredoslovenské Muzeum v Banskej Bystrici* (Banská Bystrica in the Central Slovak Museum of Banská Bystrica), (Banská Bystrica: Studio harmony, 2006), 15; Mácelová, "Ikonografia gotických kachlic z banskobystrické radnice" (The iconography of the Gothic stove tiles from the town hall of Banská Bystrica), in *Gotické a renesančné kachlice v Karpatoch*, ed. Ján Chovanec (Trebišov: Arx Paris, 2005), 205-16+264, 216, fig. 4.3.

<sup>70</sup> Batariuc, *Cable din Moldova*, 107; Batariuc, "Cahle din timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare de la Cetatea Sucevei" (Stove tiles from the times of Stephen the Great, from the fortification of Suceava), *Arx Transilvaniae* 10-11 (2000-2001): 42, fig. 2.6; Batariuc and Sergiu Haimovici, "Elemente animaliere pe cahle descoperite in Moldova" (Animal elements discovered on stove tiles from Moldova), *Arheologia Moldovei* 26 (2003): 151, fig. 3.1, 153.

<sup>71</sup> Batariuc, *Cable din Moldova*, 107; Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu and Popa, *Mărturii de civilizație medievală*, 49, fig. 28.

<sup>72</sup> Batariuc, *Cable din Moldova*, 107.

<sup>73</sup> Voica Maria Pușcașu and Nicolae Pușcașu, "Mărturii de civilizație și urbanizare medievală descoperite în vatra istorică a Iașilor" (Testimonies of medieval civilization discovered in the historical center of Iași), *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor. Monumente de Istoria Artei* 1983: 48, fig. 23; Batariuc, *Cable din Moldova*, 107.

<sup>74</sup> Vladimír Brych, *Kachle: doby gotické, renesanční a raně barokní: výběrový katalog Národního muzea v Praze* (Stove tiles from the Gothic period, Renaissance and early Baroque. Selective Catalogue of the National Museum Prague) (Prague: Národní Muzeum, 2004), 94, 95, fig. 184. For other examples of this group see ibidem, 187; 96, fig. 188; Julie Richterová, *Středověké kachle* (Medieval stove tiles) (Prague: Muzeum hlávního Mesta Prahy, 1982), 43, cat. 264, tab. 51/5.

<sup>75</sup> Brych, *Kachle: doby gotické*, 95, fig. 185.

<sup>76</sup> Zdeněk Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské víly – Meluzini – y ikonografii českých reliéfních kachlů" (The motif of the sea fairy Melusina in the iconography of Czech stove tiles decorated in relief), *Archaeologia historica* 14 (1989): 415, 425, fig. 7.3.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, 415, 425, fig. 7.4.

<sup>78</sup> Brych, *Kachle: doby gotické*, 95, fig. 186.

<sup>79</sup> Hazlbauer and M. Glosová, "Stavební rekonstrukce pozdní gotický kachlových kamen z hradu Lichnice" (Reconstruction of the Late Medieval Tile Stoves from Lichnice Castle), *Archaeologia historica* 23 (1998): 460, fig. 2.5, 464, fig. 5.3 and 5.5.

<sup>80</sup> Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské víly," 415, 426, fig. 8.2.



ground, originating from urban contexts in Chrudim<sup>81</sup> and Jesenice.<sup>82</sup> Two other related tiles come from urban contexts in Bohemia, from Usti nad Orlicí (fig. 18)<sup>83</sup> and Kouřim.<sup>84</sup> A last example of directly related items can be seen on tiles from Prague<sup>85</sup> and Chotovice.<sup>86</sup> Details of preserved fragments, such as the heraldic shield decorated with fleur-de-lys, allow one to presume that the tile from Chotovice was copied from those in Prague.



Fig. 17: Two-tailed siren. Lichnice, castle, end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem, 415, 427, fig. 9.5, 428, fig. 10.15, 429, fig. 11.2, 11.3, 11.5, 11.6, 11.9, 11.15.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem, 415, 427, fig. 9.4.

<sup>83</sup> Brych, *Kachle: doby gotické*, 96, fig. 191; Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské víly," 415, 427, fig. 9.1. At Usti nad Orlicí also another type of siren was discovered; see Brych, *Kachle doby gotické*, 94, fig. 183; Hazlbauer, *Krásy středověkých kamen. Odraž náboženských idejí v českém uměleckém řemesle* (The beauty of medieval stoves. The reflection of religious ideas in Czech crafts) (Prague: Zvon, 1998), fig. 118.

<sup>84</sup> Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské víly," 415, 426, fig. 8.4.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, 415, 429, fig. 11.10, 11.11, 11.14.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, 415, 429, fig. 11.12.



Fig. 18: Two-tailed siren. Usti nad Orlicí, 15<sup>th</sup> century

These distributions, related to previous data on medieval production centers of tiles, suggest the local production of tiles with the two-tailed siren by workshops in Basel, Buda, Banská Bystrica,<sup>87</sup> Prague (the most important center promoting this motif, with fragments from at least 12 tiles created with at least six distinct moulds),<sup>88</sup> Suceava,<sup>89</sup> Feldioara (12 identical tiles), and somewhere in the Szekler region of Transylvania. The products of these centers and their copies were not transported over great distances; the farthest distances were those between Buda and Oradea (ca. 275 km), Prague and Jindřichův Hradec (155 km), and Chrudim and Jesenice (188 km), and in each of these cases only inside one and the same medieval province. Despite the restricted circulation of directly related tiles decorated with the two-tailed siren, the motif is nevertheless recognizable over its entire area of use, and this indicates the existence of

<sup>87</sup> Štefan P. Holčík, "Středověká kachliarska Dielňa v Banskej Bystrici" (The medieval tile workshop in Banská Bystrica), *Zborník Slovenského Národného Múzea* 68 (1974): 175-93.

<sup>88</sup> See table III,1-10. I excluded three small fragments published by Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské víly, 428, fig. 10.9, 10.10 and 10.12, because due to their small dimensions they could fit any of the previously mentioned types. I also did not include them separately in the table.

<sup>89</sup> Paraschiva Victoria Batariuc, "Ateliere pentru producerea cahllelor în Moldova medievală" (Workshops producing stove tiles in medieval Moldavia), *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie* 43/2 (1992): 207-24.

some indirect contacts that allowed for its dissemination over most of Central and Eastern Europe.

I have listed the iconographical attributes of the two-tailed sirens on tiles in table 1. The analysis of these attributes leads to a series of observations.

|                                                         |            | Bohemia<br>and<br>Moravia<br>49 | Hungary<br>14 | Moldavia<br>7 | Holy German<br>Empire<br>and Swiss<br>7 | <u>Total</u><br>77 |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                                           | M          | 5                               | 3             | 4             | 1                                       | 13                 |
|                                                         | F          | 22                              | 7             | 1             | 2                                       | 32                 |
|                                                         | uncertain  | 22                              | 4             | 0             | 4                                       | 30                 |
| <b>Lower<br/>body</b>                                   | tails      | 1                               | 6             | 5             | 1                                       | 13                 |
|                                                         | tails-fish | 9                               | 7             | 0             | 1                                       | 17                 |
|                                                         | fish       | 25                              | 1             | 0             | 5                                       | 31                 |
| <b>Naked<br/>or ac-<br/>centu-<br/>ated<br/>breasts</b> |            | 20                              | 5             | 1             | 7                                       | 33                 |
| <b>Crown</b>                                            |            | 30                              | 14            | 4             | 6                                       | 54                 |
| <b>Crab</b>                                             |            | 1                               | 4             | 0             | 0                                       | 5                  |
| <b>Stars</b>                                            |            | 2                               | 1             | 0             | 0                                       | 3                  |
| <b>Solar<br/>circles<br/>or<br/>rosettes</b>            |            | 0                               | 4             | 0             | 0                                       | 4                  |
| <b>crosses</b>                                          |            | 0                               | 0             | 1             | 0                                       | 1                  |
| <b>Cloth-<br/>ing<br/>details</b>                       |            | 30                              | 9             | 2             | 5                                       | 46                 |

Table 1: The iconographical attributes of the two-tailed sirens on tiles

Most of the sirens are shown as female (32), but almost as frequently they are of uncertain gender (30), and sometimes clearly male (13), probably through contamination with male sea divinities. Equally great confusion is related to the anatomy of the siren's lower body, ending either in simple fish tails covered with scales (13), or in tails changing into fish with fins (17), but mostly ending in independent fish biting their torso, which ends abruptly under the waist or in what looks like undeveloped legs (31). In most of the cases the siren wears a crown (54). In Transylvania, for example, all the tiles depict the siren with some type of crown. Mostly, details of clothing are also depicted (46), either skirts that cover her genitalia, or belts hanging in a suggestive manner (on some Bohemian tiles). These belts underline even more the sexual ambiguity of the siren, since on these tiles it is depicted with feminine traits and naked

breasts. Other cases show representations of mantles, large sleeves, shirts with buttons, collars or veils made of lace. On many tiles, the breasts of the siren are accentuated, mostly depicted naked (33). Also, when the siren is female, she generally displays long loose hair, another symbol of seduction. Rarer attributes are the crab (5), stars (3), rosettes or solar circles (4), and flowers (4). Sometimes these elements may be simply decorative, filling up the empty surface in the composition or enriching the frame.

Starting with the tails of the siren, one sees that the motif of the siren holding up her tails transformed into fish that bite her body clearly predominates in the German and Czech areas. In Hungary and Moldavia, in almost all of the representations, the siren has simple tails or holds partly independent fish. Some scholars have suggested that the two-tailed siren derives from the Biblical motif of Jonah eaten by the whale, which also features on stove tiles (but only in Bohemia. In three cases it was discovered in the same places as the siren, but it is not clear whether they come from the same archaeological contexts or not).<sup>90</sup> The earliest tiles with sirens, those from Basel, show them with the tails completely transformed into independent fish. The related tiles from Buda and Oradea, although dated likewise to the second half of the fourteenth century, depict the siren with simple tails. I therefore presume that both types of representations were used from the very beginning, each being preferred in distinct areas. Compared to sirens featuring in other arts, the type with simple tails is the usual form and the type with independent fish had probably been combined with the image of the siren holding a fish in each hand. Still, there are cases in which, in an area where one type predominates, faulty copying might also have led to the use of the complementary type. This might be the case with the tile from Turea (appendix I.10), the only one from Hungary showing the siren with her tails transformed into fish. I believe that although there are some similarities between the two-tailed sirens and Jonah swallowed by the whale<sup>91</sup> (regarding the position and the rendering of the fish) there are more arguments contradicting a possible iconographical influence from the Old Testament scene on the siren. First of all, tiles with Jonah are only known from Bohemia, and none is known from the areas where the siren first appeared on tiles. Then, Jonah is never swallowed by two fish and he never holds the whale by the tail. It seems therefore more probable that the type of siren with tails as independent fish is due to another influence, maybe that of the siren as a bird holding fish in her hands, and that it was the two-tailed siren of this type that later influenced the design of the less frequent depictions of Jonah on tiles in Bohemia.

These attributes provide arguments for several of the siren's possible functions. The two-tailed siren might represent sexual temptation through the position of the tails, the naked or accentuated breasts, the accent on the genital area, and her flowing hair. She might stand as an image of vice or as a zoological curiosity. Because of her

<sup>90</sup> Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské víly," 436: Prague, Plzeň and Tábor.

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem, 432, fig. 14.

representation on shields on most of the Bohemian tiles, she might be part of heraldic devices (although this does not explain her specific meaning). The general image, however, is that of a bizarre and ambiguous creature being devoured or devouring herself. None of the functions mentioned above can account for the great popularity of sirens on medieval stove tiles. I will therefore argue that such popularity may be explained by the apotropaic function of the siren.

In her analysis of marginal representations presumed to have apotropaic function, Ruth Melinkoff specifically mentions the hybrids and animal monsters, including the siren. She attributes to these images the basic function of repelling the evil embodied by demons by being images of evil itself, distracting the attention of the demons through curious, ambiguous or funny representations, frightening them through religious, sexual, violent, or hideous figures.<sup>92</sup> The two-tailed siren represents an impressive accumulation of all these. She is a possible representation of the Devil, she is ambiguous (male/female), has strong sexual attributes (the naked breasts, the fish), and violent attributes (devours herself or is being devoured by fish). The efficacy of these images seems to be doubled by religious representations that feature on the same stoves as the siren. The combination of powerful images from different layers of belief, official and popular, may have conferred stronger protection.

Analyzing the attributes of the siren, I have shown the insistence with which she is presented as a powerful monster (with a crown, a royal attribute), strongly associated with water (fish tails or independent fish, the crab). Therefore, one can argue for the protective power of a water-related hybrid creature on an object that represents a fire-related danger. Fighting a threat through a representation embodying the complementary principle is another characteristic of medieval magical belief.<sup>93</sup>

An extra argument for the siren's efficiency as an apotropaic image, besides her attributes of wealth and power, are the magical powers attributed to her. The siren charms through the beauty of her song or her body. Even more, sirens were used to confer protection throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period on amulets and talismans,<sup>94</sup> medallions and jewelry<sup>95</sup> or lay badges.<sup>96</sup> I believe this hypothesis is the

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<sup>92</sup> Melinkoff, *Averting Demons*, 45-51.

<sup>93</sup> For terminology and magic rationality see Kieckhefer, "Specific Rationality."

<sup>94</sup> Hausmann and Kriss-Rettenbeck, *Amulett*, 214-7.

<sup>95</sup> L.J.A. Loewenthal, "Amulets in Medieval Sculpture: I: General Outline," *Folklore* 1 (1978): 3-12; Carl Lindahl et al. (ed.), *Medieval Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs and Customs* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2000), 12, s.v. "Amulet and talisman."

<sup>96</sup> Some authors presume that the badges with lay iconography were also worn for protective ends. One argument is that sometimes they have inscriptions such as "luck to the one who wears me." Another is that some lay badges were discovered folded as votive offering in rivers and fountains. See Jos Koldeweij, "The Wearing of Significant Badges, Religious and Secular: The Social Meaning of a Behavioural Pattern" in *Showing Status: Representation of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Wim Blockmans and Janse Antheun (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 307-28; Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges. Medieval Finds from Excavations in London* (London, The Stationary Office, 1998); Willy Piron, "Late

most complete and viable, retaining a degree of circumspection due to the lack of primary sources on the medieval reception and use of representations on stove tiles by their creators, buyers and owners.

I have shown how stove tiles decorated with two-tailed sirens form a unitary group. Indifferent to the ambiguity and transformation of the image, the motif is easily recognizable in all of its shapes. Chronologically, the motif saw the greatest popularity in the fifteenth century. A later representation comes from a tile in Doberan (Mecklenburg), dated 1600, where the siren is depicted without any details but is still easily recognizable.<sup>97</sup> Taken over in the baroque repertoire due to her decorative functions, the siren re-appears in folk art, usually combined with vegetal motifs. It does so, for example, on a Habban crown tile from seventeenth-century Hungary, in which the siren is depicted over a garland and her torso and her simple tails do not meet.<sup>98</sup> Other types of siren can be found on late tiles, for example in Ukraine at Kutî; on this nineteenth-century tile, the siren is depicted with only one tail, with one hand blowing a horn and with the other holding a fish.<sup>99</sup>

The siren was never more popular on stove tiles than in the fifteenth century, nor on other related objects such as the decorative ceramic disks that were fashionable in Moldavia at the same time. Two types of sirens are known on such disks. One has male traits and the tails were transformed into independent fish. Disks with this representation once decorated, besides other motifs, the cornices of the churches of St. Nicholas in Dorohoi,<sup>100</sup> St. Procopius in Bădeuți, St. George in Voroneț, St. Nicholas in Iași, and other buildings at the princely court in Suceava.<sup>101</sup> The other type is a crowned siren, with simple tails and details of clothing, also found in the court of Suceava, but also at the Orthodox Probota monastery<sup>102</sup> and the Orthodox church in Feleac (a Moldavian foundation in Transylvania). The latter type is very similar, although not identical, to the sirens on the group of tiles from Suceava and Iași (appendix, table II. 2, 3, 4, 5). It is generally accepted that the motifs on disks, manufactured in a similar way, were copied from those on stove tiles. In the case of sirens, one wonders if such copying also retained some of the functions of the image from tiles. I suggest that it did. Some of the arguments in favor of the protective function of the image on tiles can be

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Medieval Religious and Secular Badges," in *Centre, Region, Periphery: Medieval Europe*, ed. Guido Helmig et al. (Hertingen, Folio-Verlag, 2002), 376-8; Tomáš Vlinský, "K nálezům středověkých poutních adznaků v českých zemích" (On the medieval pilgrim badges found in Bohemia), *Archaeologia historica* 23 (1998): 435-55.

<sup>97</sup> Konrad Strauss, *Kachelkunst des 15. bis 17. Jahrhunderts*, vol. III (Munich: Heydenreich, 1983), table 8.2.

<sup>98</sup> Tibor Sábjan, *Népi cserépkályhák* (Folk Tiles) (Budapest: Múzsák Népművelődési K., 1991), 44, fig. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Roșu and Brăjanu, *Cable*, 72, 155, C1988.

<sup>100</sup> Paraschiva Victoria Batariuc, "Decorul ceramic al monumentelor din Moldova medievală" (Ceramic decoration of monuments in medieval Moldavia), *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei, seria Artă Plastică* 42 (1995): 8, fig. 3.9.

<sup>101</sup> Ibidem, 8, fig. 3.9., 13-14.

<sup>102</sup> Ibidem, 8, fig. 3.11., 14.

applied to disks as well. The three lobed symbol that features besides the siren on the disks from Dorohoi, Bădeuți, Voroneț, Iași, and Suceava can be connected to the knots (of Solomon) and interlaces also considered as fulfilling a protective function,<sup>103</sup> and it can also be found on tiles (besides the crosses and pentagrams on the tiles from Klačtorisko discussed above). The friezes of disks decorating the window and door frames and the cornices of some Moldavian buildings, especially churches, can be also defined as marginal representations. Their location could be interpreted as protecting the opening towards the interior space and the whole building.

Another relevant analogy can be drawn with the images and inscriptions found on fourteenth- to sixteenth-century bells preserved in Transylvania. Some of the texts on these medieval objects demonstrate their assumed power against evil tempests (*auras nocivas* – Bazna), hailstorms, raging storms, thunderstorms (*grandinis turma, turbines conflictur, fulminis ictus* – Feldioara), tempests of the air, and demons (*tempestates aeris demonumque* – Bod). Other magic inscriptions include the names of the four evangelists, the Three Kings, the letters of the alphabet,<sup>104</sup> and the name of God (*Tetragramaton*). The images on these items consist of both religious imagery and depictions of hybrids and monsters, sometimes used side-by-side on the same bell. A series of representations of women with bird bodies, who could be sirens but also harpies, feature on bells and baptismal fonts produced by the workshop in Sighișoara in the middle of the fifteenth century.<sup>105</sup> The prototypes of these images were different metal objects, mostly pilgrim and lay badges, used during the molding process and therefore preserved in this form. One should not forget the presumed apotropaic function of the badges themselves.<sup>106</sup>

In any case, the apotropaic function of the representations on the Transylvanian bells becomes obvious through the accompanying inscriptions. The bell from Feldioara, created in a workshop in Sighișoara reads: *Hac Cristi tuba pellatur grandinis turma, turbinis conflictus stringatur fulminis ictus* (May the hailstorm be hit by this bell of God, fighting the raging storm, uniting with the powerful stroke of thunder).<sup>107</sup> The images accompanying this text depict Samson killing the lion three times, a dragon twice, and a lion twice. One should note that they have close parallels on stove tiles created in the same period and in the same region. On other bells, “magic” inscriptions are accompanied by religious images and crosses and “magic” images are mixed with religious ones. For example, one very old apotropaic symbol *Hystera*,<sup>108</sup> a Medusa-like head sur-

<sup>103</sup> Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons*, 163-5; Hansmann and Kriss-Rettenbeck, *Amulett*, 156-62.

<sup>104</sup> Franz Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1925).

<sup>105</sup> Elek Benkő, *Erdély középkori harangjai és bronz keresztelmedencéi* (Medieval bronze bells and baptismal fonts from Transylvania) (Kolozsvár: Polis, 2002), 466, 467, fig. 128: baptismal font – Brașov (II.2), bells-Bratei, Sibiu county (I.24), Bahnea, Mureș county (I.50), Șoarș, Brașov county (I.247-248), Roandola, Sibiu county (I.281).

<sup>106</sup> Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, 16-24. See also above.

<sup>107</sup> Benkő, *Erdély középkori harangjai*, 263

<sup>108</sup> Vikan, *Sacred Images*, IX: “Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium,” 65-86, 77, fig. 18; Jeffrey Spier, “A Revival of Antique Magical Practice in Tenth-Century Constantinople,” in *Magic and the Classical Tradi-*

rounded by serpents depicting the womb wandering through the female body like an animal and causing illness, features on four bells, from Corvinești (Kékesújfalú, Bistrița-Năsăud County), Cireșoaia (Magyardécse, Bistrița-Năsăud County), Fântânița (Mezőköbölkül, Bistrița-Năsăud County) and Hetiur (Hétúr, Marienburg, Mureș County), all cast in Bistrița by a master called George. Hystera is placed besides images of St. George and crosses.<sup>109</sup> The bells, dated from the 1530s to the 1540s, clearly indicate the ease with which religious and “magic” images were employed in the decoration of objects used for both magic and religious purposes.

## CONCLUSIONS

Some images on medieval stove tiles, such as the pentagram, orants, hands, masks, birds, and the two-tailed siren, can be interpreted through the paradigm of the common tradition of magic. The wide geographical, social, and even religious distributions of these items indicate the existence of wide-spread protective needs fulfilled by the use of the same images. It is possible to see the stoves as liminal and potentially dangerous objects and to interpret (at least some of) the images decorating them as apotropaic images. This hypothesis is supported by analogies with similar representations in attested contexts of magic. Another argument is the degree to which they comply with the general principles of protective magic. The tiles selected for the present discussion associate magic and religious representations (crosses, angels, prayers); the images are ambiguous, repetitive, and cryptic. The siren illustrates the principle of counteracting a fire-danger with a monster dominating the water-world.

This argumentation should be taken into consideration as a tentative approach, or, as many titles would have it, a “contribution.” Further research on Central European popular magic is certainly needed, not only at the level of iconography, but also on textual sources. Such studies would also contribute to a more nuanced picture of the shift in the common tradition (of culture in general and of magic in particular) marked by the Reformation.<sup>110</sup> The evidence of stove tiles points to a change in iconography by the end of the sixteenth century, when the typically medieval representations (especially the apotropaic ones analyzed here) ceased to hold favor, and were replaced by vegetal and geometric patterns, in particular by the so-called “wall-paper” type, continuing from one tile to another.

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tion, ed. Charles Burnett et al. (London: Warburg Institute, 2006), 29-36: Hystera amulets spread to Russia in the eleventh century, and spells of this type are also found in books written in Polish, Bosnian, German, Italian, and Hebrew.

<sup>109</sup> Benkő, *Erdély középkori harangjai*, 270, 278-9, 296, 310, 478-9.

<sup>110</sup> Charles Zika, *Exorcising our Demons. Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), esp. chapter XIV: “Writing the Visual into History: Changing Cultural Perceptions of Late Medieval and Reformation Germany”; Robert W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London et al.: The Hambledon Press, 1987).



I believe that further research must clarify and nuance the assertions expressed here tentatively. It is nevertheless clear that stove tiles constitute a rich source material for the study of popular culture, popular religion, and folk magic.

THE TWO-TAILED SIREN – TABLE I: HUNGARY

| No.             | place of discovery | gender | naked or accentuated breasts | attributes                  | tails/fish | context                     | dating (from bibliography) | found together with                                                   | notes           | bibliography                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Central Hungary |                    |        |                              |                             |            |                             |                            |                                                                       |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1               | Buda               | m      | -                            | crown, crab, flowers        | tails      | royal palace                | 1342-1382                  |                                                                       | related to 6    | Imre Holl, "Kőszépkori kályhacsempék Magyarországon" (Medieval stove tiles from Hungary) I, <i>Budapest Régeli</i> , 18 (1958): 225-227, fig. 27. Károly Magyari, "Ofentischel aus dem Budai Königpalast," in <i>Budapest im Mittelalter</i> (Bonn: Bielefeld, 1991), 275, cat. 403. Holl, "Kőszépkori kályhacsempék," 243, 244, fig. 56. Holl, "Spälgotische Ofentischel," <i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i> 50 (1998): 183, fig. 42. Holl and Pál Vot, <i>Alle magyarische Ofentischel</i> (Budapest, 1963), 65, cat. 13, fig. 13. Konrad Strauss, <i>Die Kunst des 15. bis 17. Jahrhunderts</i> (Munich, 1983), table 19, fig. 2. Peter Havassy (ed.), <i>Germische, kalyhacsempék, ábrázolások. Földművelésügyi és Alföldi és peremvidéki</i> (Potters and tile masters. Medieval and early modern stove tiles from the area of the Hungarian Plain) (Gyula, 2003), 114, cat. 229. |
| 2               | Buda               | f      | +                            | crown, skirt                | tails-fish | royal palace                | 1408-1437                  |                                                                       | related to 3, 4 | Edith Kocsis, "Asztás a télgyűlés utca 24-ben" (Rescue excavation at 24 Téli Gyűlés Street), <i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i> 33 (1999): 356, fig. 4.1.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 3               | Nyék               | f      | +                            | crown, skirt                | tails-fish | royal residence (near Buda) | end XIV-beg. XV            |                                                                       | related to 2, 4 | Edith Kocsis, "Asztás a télgyűlés utca 24-ben" (Rescue excavation at 24 Téli Gyűlés Street), <i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i> 33 (1999): 356, fig. 4.1.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 4               | Budaörs -hévíz     | f      | +                            | crown, skirt                | tails-fish | suburb of Buda              | end XIV                    |                                                                       | related to 2, 3 | Edith Kocsis, "Asztás a télgyűlés utca 24-ben" (Rescue excavation at 24 Téli Gyűlés Street), <i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i> 33 (1999): 356, fig. 4.1.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 5               | Fornáz             | m?     | -                            | crown, skirt (with buttons) | tails-fish | noble residence             | end XIV                    | crani angel with inscription, St. George, knight in tournament, viper |                 | Edith Kocsis, "Asztás a télgyűlés utca 24-ben" (Rescue excavation at 24 Téli Gyűlés Street), <i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i> 33 (1999): 356, fig. 4.1.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

| 6                       | Oradea                       | m | - | crown,<br>crab,<br>flowers         | tails      | fortification | second half XIV | related<br>to 1                 | Adrian A. Rusu, "Căbie din Transilvania" III<br>(Store tiles from Transylvania), <i>Acta Musei<br/>Napocensis</i> 39/40 (2002/2003)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Northern Hungary</b> |                              |   |   |                                    |            |               |                 |                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 7                       | Banská<br>Bystrica<br>-SNP 1 | f | - | crown,<br>skirt                    | tails-fish | urban house   | 1450-1454       | identical to 8<br>several tiles | Marta Mácelová, "Gotické kachlové pece z<br>banskobystrické radnice" (Gothic tile stoves<br>from the town hall of Banská Bystrica),<br><i>Archaeologica historica</i> 24 (1999): 417, fig. 8.8, 420.<br><i>Banská Bystrica a Stredovekú Múzeum v Banskéj<br/>Bystrici</i> (Banská Bystrica in the National Slovak<br>Museum of Banská Bystrica), (Banská Bystrica,<br>2006), 15.<br>Mácelová, "Iconografia gotických kachlí z<br>banskobystrické radnice," (The iconography of<br>the Gothic stove tiles from the town hall of<br>Banská Bystrica), in <i>Gotické a renesančné kachle v<br/>Košiciach</i> , ed. Ján Chovanec (Trebíšov, 2005),<br>205-215+264, 216, fig. 4.3. |
| 8                       | Banská<br>Bystrica           | f | - | crown,<br>skirt                    | tails-fish | city hall     | XV              | identical to 7<br>several tiles | Mácelová, "Gotické kachlové pece."<br>Mácelová, "Iconografia gotických kachlí."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 9                       | Radvaň                       | ? | + | crown/hat,<br>belt skirt,<br>crab? | tails      |               |                 |                                 | Zdeněk Házlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny – Melu-<br>zini – y ikonografii českých reliktních kachlí"<br>(The motif of the sea hary Melusina in the icon-<br>ography of Czech stove tiles decorated in relief),<br><i>Archaeologica historica</i> 14 (1989): 416, 420, fig. 12.3.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Transylvania</b>     |                              |   |   |                                    |            |               |                 |                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 10                      | Cluj-Napoca,<br>Cluj county  | f | - | crown,<br>shirt, belt              | fish       | curia?        | end XV          |                                 | Daniela Marcu Istrate, <i>Căbie din Transilvania și<br/>Bosna</i> (Store tiles from Transylvania and the<br>Bosna) (Cluj, 2004), 278, 485, fig. 6.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

|    |                                    |   |   |                                       |             |                    |             |                      |                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----|------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11 | Feldioara, Braşov county           | f | + | crown, maltese cross, stars, rosettes | taille-fish | pottery workshop   | beg. XVI    |                      | 12 tiles          | Danila Marcu, "Căile săseşti din sec. XVI-XVII descoperite la Feldioara, jud. Braşov," (Saxon stone tiles excavated at Feldioara, Braşov County), <i>Revista Monumentelor Istorice</i> 61/1 (1992): 29, 31, fig. 8.<br>Marcu Istrate, <i>Căile din Transilvania şi Banat</i> , 400.<br>Marcu Istrate, "Feldioara/Marienburg, in the last middle age- Archaeological contributors to the history of the settlement in the 15th-16th centuries," in <i>In memoriam Radu Popa. Tranzituri ale civilizaţiei medievale în români: anghuşa</i> (Cluj, 2003), 310, 325, fig. 8.2.<br>Elek Benkő, <i>A középkori keresztes-egyházak építészete</i> (Archaeological topography of the medieval seat of Christ) (Budapest, 1992), 162, fig. 70.2.<br>Elek Benkő et al., <i>Középkori mezővárosok a Székelyföldön</i> (Medieval market towns in the Székely lands) (Kolozsvár, 1997), plate 42.<br>Marcu Istrate, <i>Căile din Transilvania şi Banat</i> , 90, 208.<br>Ménika Kármay, <i>Középkori Căile, György de Károlyváros 14.-18. század</i> (Sovereign ties from the Ciuc, Gheorgheni and Cămin regions, 14th-18th c.) (Kolozsvár, 2005), 110, cat. 3, plate 8, fig. 2.<br><i>Reportul arheologic al judeţului Harghita</i> (Sf. Gheorghe, 2000), 393, pl. 57/13 |
| 12 | Cristuru Secuiesc, Harghita county | ? | - | crown, solar circles                  | tails       | Szelet market town | XV-beg. XVI |                      | related to 13, 14 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 13 | Sinclăieni, Harghita county        | ? | - | crown, solar circles, crab            | tails       | curia              | XV-beg. XVI | knight in tournament | related to 12, 14 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 14 | Mihăleni, Harghita county          | ? | - | crown, solar circles                  | tails       |                    |             |                      | related to 12, 13 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

**Legend:**

? =uncertain

MD =missing data (unpublished, inaccessible)

THE TWO-TAILED SIREN – TABLE II: MOLDAVIA

| N° | place of discovery | gender | naked or axim-naked breasts | attributes   | tails/fish | context                                      | dating (from bibliography) | together with                        | notes                            | bibliography                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----|--------------------|--------|-----------------------------|--------------|------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Făclău             | f      | +                           | -            | tails      | princely court                               |                            |                                      |                                  | Păscăru Victoria Băltaru, <i>Căble din Moldova (secole XVII-XVIII)</i> (Stove tiles from Moldavia, 14th-17th c.) (Suceava, 1999), 163, 229, fig. 32.5. Băltaru and Sergiu Haimovici, "Elemente animale pe cablu descoperite în Moldova" (Animals on stove tiles discovered in Moldavia), <i>Arheologia Moldavi</i> 26 (2009): 151, fig. 3.2, 153. Băltaru, <i>Căble din Moldova</i> , 107. |
| 2  | Suceava            | m      | -                           | crown, dress | tails      | princely fortification                       |                            |                                      | related to 3, 4, 5               | Băltaru, "Căble din timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare de la Cetatea Sucevi" (Stove tiles from the times of Ștefan the Great, from the fortification of Suceava), <i>Arh Transilvania</i> 10-11 (2000-2001): 42, fig. 2.6. Băltaru and Haimovici, "Elemente animale," 151, fig. 3.1, 153.                                                                                                          |
| 3  | Suceava            | m      | -                           | crown, dress | tails      | princely house                               | 1480-1497                  | St. George, exotic animals, heraldic | related to 2, 4, 5 several tiles | Băltaru, <i>Căble din Moldova</i> , 107. Monica Mărgineanu-Cărsionu and Radu Popa, <i>Măști de sticlă medievală românească</i> (Testimonies of medieval Romanian civilisation (Bucharest, 1979), 49, fig. 28.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 4  | Suceava            | m      | -                           | crown, dress | tails      | urban house from area B – Câmpul Șantierilor |                            |                                      | related to 2, 3, 5               | Băltaru, <i>Căble din Moldova</i> , 107.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

|   |        |    |    |                   |        |              |                |    |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---|--------|----|----|-------------------|--------|--------------|----------------|----|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | Iagi   | m? | .  | crown,<br>crosses | talas? | urban house  | middle XV      |    | related to<br>2, 3, 4 | Voica Maria Pușcașu and Nicolae Pușcașu,<br>"Mărturie de civilizație și urbanizare<br>medievală descoperite în vatra istorică a<br>Iagilor" (Testimonies of medieval civilization<br>discovered in the historical center of Iagi),<br><i>Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor. Monumente de<br/>Literatură Arta</i> 1983: 48, fig. 23.                                                                                   |
| 6 | Vaslui |    |    |                   |        | pinely court |                |    |                       | Batușuc, <i>Căile din Moldova</i> , 107.<br>Alexandru Andreic and Rău Popescu,<br>"Sanctuarul arheologic Vaslui. Principalele<br>rezultate ale săpăturilor din 1979 de la Curtea<br>Domnească" (The archaeological site of<br>Vaslui. Main results from the 1979<br>excavations of the princely court), <i>Acta<br/>Museum Moldaviae</i> , 2 (1980): 197, fig. 3/1.<br>Batușuc, <i>Căile din Moldova</i> , 107, 187. |
| 7 | Roman  | MD | MD | MD                | MD     | MD           | second half XV | MD |                       | Unpublished. Batanur, <i>Căile din Moldova</i> , 172,<br>note 344.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

THE TWO-TAILED SIREN – TABLE III: BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA

| No. | place of discovery | gender | naked or semi-naked breasts | attributes                                           | tails/fish | context | dating (from bibliography) | together with | notes                         | bibliography                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----|--------------------|--------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------|----------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Prague             | f      | +                           | crown                                                | fish       | urban?  | XV                         |               | heraldic? related to 2, 4, 49 | Vladimír Brych, <i>Kachle doby gotické, renesanční a nově barokní: výběrý katalog Národního muzea v Praze</i> (Slove tiles from the Gothic period, Renaissance and early baroque. Selective catalogue of the National Museum Prague) (Prague, 2004), 187                                                                                                                   |
| 2   | Prague             | f      | +                           | crown, shirt with long sleeves, collar and belt?     | fish       | urban?  | XV                         |               | related to 1, 4, 49           | Brych, <i>Kachle doby gotické</i> , 94, 95, fig. 184                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 3   | Prague             | ?      | -                           | crown                                                | tails-fish | urban?  | end XV-beg. XVI            |               | related to 14, 15             | Brych, <i>Kachle doby gotické</i> , 95, fig. 185                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 4   | Prague             | f      | +                           | crown, belt                                          | fish       | urban?  | XV                         |               | heraldic? related to 1, 2, 49 | Brych, <i>Kachle doby gotické</i> , 96, fig. 188                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 5   | Prague             | f      | ?                           | crown, sleeves, crab                                 | fish       | urban?  | XV                         |               | heraldic?                     | Brych, <i>Kachle doby gotické</i> , 96, fig. 190                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 6   | Prague             | f      | +                           | crown, coat with large sleeves? shirt? fleur-de-lys? | fish       | urban   | second half XV             |               | heraldic?                     | Zdeněk Házlbauer, <i>Kráva středověké krasy</i> (The beauty of medieval stove tiles) (Prague, 1998), 197, fig. 118.2<br>Házlbauer, "Náboženské motivy českých gotických reliéfních kachlic," (Religious motifs on relief stove tiles from the Czech Republic), <i>Archaeologia Aeterna</i> 21 (1996): 472, fig. 3.5.<br>Házlbauer, "Motiv mořské vily," 415, 426, fig. 8.6 |

|    |         |   |   |                                                                |               |        |                |                                                                                   |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----|---------|---|---|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7  | Prague  | ? | + | crown, tails?                                                  | fish          | urban  | end XV         |                                                                                   |  | Richterová, <i>Středověká kachle</i> (Medieval Stone Tiles) (Prague, 1982), 43, cat. 259, tab. 51/2.<br>Häublauer, "Motiv močáské vlny," 415, 427, fig. 9.2.                                                                                                |
| 8  | Prague  | P | + | crown, sleeves, lace across the chest, lozenges, fleur-de-lys? | fish          | urban  |                | heraldic?<br>minimum 2 tiles<br>related to 16, 22                                 |  | Häublauer, "Motiv močáské vlny," 415, 426, fig. 8.7, 428, fig. 10.4, 10.16.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 9  | Prague  | f | + | crown, belt                                                    | ?             | urban  |                |                                                                                   |  | Häublauer, "Motiv močáské vlny," 415, 428, fig. 10.2.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 10 | Prague  | ? | ? | fleur-de-lys?, cossette                                        | fish          | urban  |                | heraldic<br>minimum 2 tiles<br>related to 33                                      |  | Häublauer, "Motiv močáské vlny – Meluani – y ikonografii českých reliéfních kachlí," 415, 429, fig. 11.10, 11.11, 11.14.                                                                                                                                    |
| 11 | Chrudim | f | - | crown with crosses<br>stele, shirt with buttons, skirt         | tail-<br>fish | urban  | second half XV | MD                                                                                |  | Häublauer, <i>Kachle středověkých kamenných domů</i> , 197, fig. 118.1<br>Häublauer, "Motiv močáské vlny," 415, 425, fig. 7.5.                                                                                                                              |
| 12 | Chrudim | ? | ? | ?                                                              | fish          | urban  |                | heraldic?<br>related to 25<br>minimum 6 tiles, 2 variants without heraldic shield |  | Häublauer, "Motiv močáské vlny," 415, 427, fig. 9.5, 428, fig. 10.15, 429, fig. 11.2, 11.3, 11.5, 11.6, 11.9, 11.15.                                                                                                                                        |
| 13 | Litnice | m | - | crown, skirt                                                   | fish          | castle | end XV         |                                                                                   |  | Häublauer and M. Glisová, "Stavební rekonstrukce pozdní gotický kachlových kamenných z hradu Litnice" (Reconstruction of the Late Medieval Tile Stoves from Litnice Castle), <i>Archaeologica Litensia</i> 23 (1998): 460, fig. 2.5, 464, fig. 5.3 and 5.5. |



|    |                            |   |   |                                               |            |               |    |  |                     |                                                                                                       |
|----|----------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------------------|------------|---------------|----|--|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 14 | Usti nad<br>Orlicí         | f | - | crown, shirt<br>with buttons,<br>skirt, stole | tails-fish | MD            | XV |  |                     | Brych, <i>Kamke doby gotické</i> 94, fig. 183.<br>Hazelbauer, <i>Kráta zhrubých kamen</i> , fig. 118  |
| 15 | Usti nad<br>Orlicí         | m | - | shirt with<br>buttons,<br>rosette             | fish       | urban         | XV |  | related to 24       | Brych, <i>Kamke doby gotické</i> 96, fig. 191.<br>Hazelbauer, "Motiv molské vily," 415, 427, fig. 9.1 |
| 16 | Mukáňov u<br>Rican         | m | - | crown, shirt<br>with collar<br>and belt       | fish       | MD            | XV |  | related to 8,<br>22 | Brych, <i>Kamke doby gotické</i> 95, fig. 186                                                         |
| 17 | Hradec<br>Kralov           | f | + | shirt with<br>buttons, skirt,<br>belt         | tails-fish | urban         |    |  | minimum 2<br>tiles  | Hazelbauer, "Motiv molské vily," 415, 425, fig. 7.2,<br>429, fig. 11.13                               |
| 18 | Nachvaldly                 | ? | - | shirt with<br>collar                          | tails-fish | fortification |    |  | related to 3,<br>19 | Hazelbauer, "Motiv molské vily," 415, 425, fig. 7.3                                                   |
| 19 | Kokotin<br>castle          | f | + | crown, shirt<br>with collar                   | tails-fish | castle        |    |  | related to 3,<br>18 | Hazelbauer, "Motiv molské vily," 415, 425, fig. 7.4                                                   |
| 20 | Diep,<br>Rychnov<br>region | f | + | crown with<br>crosses, skirt                  | tails-fish | fortification |    |  |                     | Hazelbauer, "Motiv molské vily," 415, 425, fig. 7.6                                                   |
| 21 | Praha                      | ? | - | crown, collar,<br>sleeves, belt               | fish       | urban         |    |  | heraldic?           | Hazelbauer, "Motiv molské vily," 415, 426, fig. 8.1                                                   |
| 22 | Jindřichův<br>Hradec       | ? | + | crown,<br>sleeves, belt                       | fish       | castle        |    |  | related to 8,<br>16 | Hazelbauer, "Motiv molské vily," 415, 426, fig. 8.2                                                   |

|    |                                           |   |   |                                                |            |               |  |  |                            |                                                               |
|----|-------------------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------|--|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 23 | Nové<br>Sadeč,<br>Rakovník<br>region      | ? | ? | skirt, leaves                                  | fish-tails | urban         |  |  | minimum 2<br>tiles         | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 426,<br>fig. 8.3, 8.5    |
| 24 | Kouřim,<br>Kolin region                   | m | - | shirt with<br>buttons                          | fish       | urban         |  |  | related to 15              | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 426,<br>fig. 8.4         |
| 25 | Jesenice,<br>Rakovník<br>region           | ? | ? | ?                                              | fish       | urban         |  |  | heraldic?<br>related to 12 | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 427,<br>fig. 9.4         |
| 26 | Tábor                                     | f | + | crown, shirt<br>w. collar and<br>sleeves, belt | fish?      | urban         |  |  |                            | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 427,<br>fig. 9.6         |
| 27 | Tábor                                     | f | ? | crown,<br>rosette?                             | ?          | urban         |  |  |                            | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.1        |
| 28 | Most                                      | ? | ? | crown, belt                                    | fish       | urban         |  |  | heraldic?                  | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 427,<br>fig. 9.7, 9.8    |
| 29 | Točim,<br>Beroun<br>region                | f | + | collar                                         | ?          | castle        |  |  |                            | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.3, 10.14 |
| 30 | Sedlčice,<br>Hrádec<br>Králové<br>region  | f | ? | crown                                          | ?          | MD            |  |  |                            | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.5        |
| 31 | Krákovec,<br>Rakovník<br>region           | f | + | crown, collar                                  | ?          | castle        |  |  |                            | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.7        |
| 32 | Chotusice,<br>Hrádec<br>Králové<br>region | ? | ? | crown                                          | ?          | fortification |  |  |                            | Hazibauer, "Motiv mošské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.8        |

|    |                                           |   |   |   |                                          |      |               |  |                           |                                                         |
|----|-------------------------------------------|---|---|---|------------------------------------------|------|---------------|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 33 | Chotovice,<br>Hradec<br>Králové<br>region | ? | ? | ? | rosette                                  | ?    | fortification |  | heraldic<br>related to 10 | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 429,<br>fig. 11.12 |
| 34 | Besnice, Jihm<br>region                   | P | ? | ? | ?                                        | ?    | fortification |  |                           | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.11 |
| 35 | Košálov,<br>Semily<br>region              | ? | ? | ? | crown                                    | ?    | castle        |  |                           | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.13 |
| 36 | Ferdubice                                 | ? | ? | ? | ?                                        | ?    | urban         |  |                           | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.17 |
| 37 | Kutná Hora                                | ? | ? | ? | leaves                                   | ?    | urban         |  |                           | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 428,<br>fig. 10.18 |
| 38 | Slaný,<br>Kladna<br>region                | ? | ? | ? | ?                                        | fish | urban         |  | heraldic?                 | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 429,<br>fig. 11.1  |
| 39 | Loupy                                     | ? | ? | ? | ?                                        | fish | urban         |  |                           | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 429,<br>fig. 11.4  |
| 40 | Lány,<br>Rakovník<br>region               | ? | ? | ? | ?                                        | fish | fortification |  | heraldic?                 | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 429,<br>fig. 11.7  |
| 41 | Crně,<br>Ferdubice<br>region              | ? | ? | ? | ?                                        | fish | fortification |  |                           | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 429,<br>fig. 11.8  |
| 42 | Nového<br>hradu v<br>Adamova              | f | + | ? | crown,<br>shirt with<br>buttons,<br>belt | fish | fortification |  |                           | Hazlbauer, "Motiv mořské vlny," 415, 430,<br>fig. 12.2  |

|    |                        |   |   |                                                        |            |                              |                |  |                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----|------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|----------------|--|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 43 | Vorěž, Kolín region    | m | - | crown, shirt with collar                               | tails-fish | MD                           |                |  |                  | Hazlbauer, "Motiv motéské vily," fig. 71.<br>Martin Nejedlý, "Od hráné dívky až k hrádům. Proměny vily Melusiny a jejích odraz v ikonografii středověkých pramenů" (From virgins to snakes and dragons. Transformations of the nymph Melusina and her representations in medieval iconography and sources). <i>Antologické ročníky</i> 54 (2002): 478, fig. 28a |
| 44 | Velvary, Kladna region | ? | + | crown, shirt with buttons, belt                        | fish       | urban                        |                |  |                  | Hazlbauer, "Motiv motéské vily," fig. 9.3<br>Nejedlý, "Od hráné dívky až k hrádům," 478, fig. 28b                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 45 | Vysokovo region        | ? | + | crown, sleeves, belt, skirt, coat of arms. INSCRIPTION | tails      | MD                           | XIV-XV         |  |                  | Strauss, <i>Die Kachelmann der 15. bis 17. Jahrhundert</i> , table 19.1<br>Hazlbauer, "Motiv motéské vily," 415, 430, fig. 12.1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 46 | Vepřek, Mělník region  | f | + | collar                                                 | ?          | ?                            |                |  |                  | Hazlbauer, "Motiv motéské vily," 415, 428, fig. 10.6                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 47 | Věteruby               | f | + | mantle, sleeves, belt                                  | ?          | close to St. Martin's church | XV             |  |                  | Boych, <i>Kachle abby gotické</i> , 96, fig. 189.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 48 | MD                     | ? | + | crown, shirt, lozenge, fleur-de-lys?                   | fish       | MD                           | end XV         |  | heraldic?        | Richterová, <i>Středověké kachle</i> , 42, cat. 249, tab. 51/1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 49 | MD                     | f | + | crown                                                  | ?          | MD                           | end XV-beg XVI |  | related to 1,2,4 | Richterová, <i>Středověké kachle</i> , 43, cat. 264, tab. 51/5                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

THE DOUBLE-TAILED SIREN – TABLE IV: THE HOLY GERMAN EMPIRE AND SWITZERLAND

| Nr. | place of discovery                | gender | naked or semi-naked breasts | attributes                                      | tails/fish | context | dating (from bibliography) | together with | notes                     | bibliography                                                                                                                 |
|-----|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------|---------|----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | MD                                | ?      | -                           | crown                                           | fish       | MD      | XV                         |               |                           | Strauss, <i>Die Kachelkunst des 15. bis 17. Jahrhunderts</i> , 107, table 18.1                                               |
| 2   | Berlin (Brandenburg)              | f      | +                           | crown                                           | tails      | MD      | XV                         |               | polychrome glaze          | Strauss, <i>Die Kachelkunst des 15. bis 17. Jahrhunderts</i> , 108, table 19.5                                               |
| 3   | MD (Saxony)                       | m      | +                           | crown, skirt with buttons, collar, belt, plants | tails-fish | MD      | end XV                     |               |                           | Strauss, <i>Die Kachelkunst des 15. bis 17. Jahrhunderts</i> , 108, table 19.3                                               |
| 4   | MD (Switzerland)                  | f      | +                           | belt                                            | fish       | MD      | XV                         |               |                           | Strauss, <i>Die Kachelkunst des 15. bis 17. Jahrhunderts</i> , 108, table 19.4                                               |
| 5   | Basel – Freimarkt (Switzerland)   | ?      | +                           | crown, skirt                                    | fish       | urban?  | second half XIV            |               | related to 6, 7<br>1 tile | Jürg Tauber, <i>Hind und Ofen im Mittelalter</i> (Olten and Freiburg, 1980), 146, 147, fig. 106.6, 328, table 18.5, fig. 238 |
| 6   | Basel – Imberggölle (Switzerland) | ?      | +                           | crown, skirt                                    | fish       | urban?  | second half XIV            |               | related to 5, 7           | Tauber, <i>Hind und Ofen im Mittelalter</i> , 146                                                                            |
| 7   | Basel – Rittergasse (Switzerland) | ?      | +                           | crown, skirt                                    | fish       | urban?  | second half XIV            |               | related to 5, 6           | Tauber, <i>Hind und Ofen im Mittelalter</i> , 146                                                                            |



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The supernatural was part of medieval life.

The extent to which this can be found in visual representations of the period is the main question of the analyses in this volume. The contributions are the result of a meeting of Central and Eastern European specialists in that field. They concentrate on the phenomenon of how images of heavenly, demonic, and miraculous entities became part of the medieval environment: for giving a closer understanding of the supernatural to the beholders and showing its influence on everyone's life.

The book offers important new insights into the "Natural History of the Supernatural."



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